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# The Development of Kaji Kito in Nichiren Shu Buddhism

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The Development of *Kaji Kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism

Kyomi J. Igarashi

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Prerequisite for Honors  
in Religion

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## ABSTRACT

While the historical and religious roots of *kaji kito* (“ritual prayer”) lay in Indian and Chinese Esoteric Buddhist practices, the most direct influence of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism, a Japanese Buddhist sect founded by the Buddhist monk, Nichiren (1222-1282), comes from Shingon and Tendai Buddhism, two traditions that precede Nichiren’s time. The historical development and initial incorporation of *kaji kito* into Nichiren Buddhism suggest that the main objective was to bring happiness to people through the use of prayer. Analysis of *kaji kito* following the death of Nichiren has shown that although different methods of *kaji kito* have developed, this notion of bringing happiness has been maintained. Changes made to the *kaji kito* of Nichiren Buddhism will be explained along with a discussion of the physical practice of *kaji kito* called *aragyō*, a 100-day ascetic practice undergone annually in Japan by some Nichiren Shu priests.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Introduction	1
Part One: The Development of <i>Kaji Kito</i> Before Nichiren's Time	
Chapter One: The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in India	8
Chapter Two: Introduction and Development of <i>Mikkyo</i> in Japan by Kukai	20
Chapter Three: Development of <i>Mikkyo</i> in Japan by Saicho	27
Chapter Four: Understanding <i>Kaji Kito</i>	31
Part Two: The Development of <i>Kaji Kito</i> During Nichiren's Time	
Chapter Five: Understanding Nichiren and His Life	35
Chapter Six: Nichiren's Views of <i>Mikkyo</i>	50
Chapter Seven: <i>Kaji Kito</i> Performed By Nichiren	68
Part Three: The Development of <i>Kaji Kito</i> After Nichiren's Death	
Chapter Eight: History of <i>Kaji Kito</i> in the Nichiren School	79
Chapter Nine: <i>Bokken</i>	94
Chapter Ten: <i>Aragyo</i>	100
Chapter Eleven: Explanation of Important Deities	109
Part Four: Conclusion and the Future of <i>Kaji Kito</i> in Nichiren Buddhism	121
Appendix	130
Works Cited	139

## INTRODUCTION

The main objective behind this thesis is to increase awareness of the unknown and often unrecognized importance of *kaji kito*, generally translated as “ritual prayer”, within Nichiren Shu, a sect of Japanese Buddhism founded during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) by a Buddhist monk by the name of Nichiren (1222-1282). In most western scholarship the term is recognized in correlation with *Shugendo*, a type of ascetic practice incorporating elements of Buddhism and Shinto, an indigenous practice of worshipping *kami* (“spiritual deities”). As a result, the majority of the sources and the understanding behind the incorporation of *kaji kito* within specific traditions of Japanese Buddhism remain only in Japanese, written by Japanese scholars. However, there are limitations to also using Japanese sources due to the hidden nature of the *kaji kito* practice and training, most of which is verbally transmitted directly from master to disciple. Even with such limitations, the hope is that this thesis will provide a better understanding of the notion of prayer and its often times forgotten significance within Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

My motive for choosing this topic comes from my own religious upbringing as a daughter of a Nichiren Shu Buddhist minister. Ever since I was young, I have been provided ample opportunities to observe particular Buddhist traditions both at my temple and within my household. Having my father and mother to teach me about the importance of these traditions and particular practices of laypeople helped me to naturally adapt to these customs that were often not only very Buddhist, but sometimes very Japanese in thought and practice. It was not until I gained more exposure to the religious diversity so prevalent in the United States, that I began to further understand and recognize the uniqueness of my family’s practices and wanted to learn more. However, having been born and raised in the United States, there are certain

constraints to the level of understanding that I can gain about specific practices that can only be done in Japan.

My specific interest in *kaji kito* comes from my childhood memories of my own father's participation in *aragyō*, a type of ascetic training undergone by some priests belonging to the Nichiren Shū sect. I recall my father participating in the practice in occasion of "special" events within the family, such as the birth of my younger brother. The four-month absence of my father was always a very questionable time for me, especially because I wanted to know what my father was doing, but no one could give me the straight answers that I wanted. The only memories that I have include my mother praying for my father's health because the severity of the ascetic practice has led to hospitalization and deaths of some practitioners. Writing this Honors Thesis has given an opportunity to answer lingering questions I had regarding *kaji kito* and *aragyō* as well as the opportunity to understand why undergoing this training was so important for my father and consequentially for my family.

The first part of this thesis will begin by explaining the historical and religious roots of *kaji kito*. While sources indicate that both Shingon and Tendai Buddhism, two Japanese Buddhist traditions that precede Nichiren's time, directly influenced Nichiren Shū's *kaji kito*, we can trace those roots further back to outside of Japan. Therefore, there is a need to understand *kaji kito* that far precedes its initial incorporation into Nichiren Shū Buddhism or even Japanese Buddhism as a whole, and therefore from its origins in Esoteric Buddhism (*Japanese. mikkyō*), which began in India and progressed into several of its surrounding countries. The discussion will also entail the development of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet and China during the time that the prevalence of Buddhism was on the brink of its disappearance as a whole in India. Although the term *kaji kito* or "ritual prayer" will not be used in this section, the specific characteristics of *kaji kito* seen

today, whether it be rituals or doctrines, will become apparent. Upon understanding Esoteric Buddhism in these two countries, we will progress into the historical and religious reasons behind the incorporation of Esoteric Buddhism in specifically Shingon and Tendai Buddhism by looking briefly at the biography of the founders of the traditions: Kukai (774-835), who founded Shingon and Saicho (767-822) who founded the Tendai tradition. At this point, the term “*kaji kito*” will be introduced, along with the elaborate explanation of the terms “*kaji*” and “*kito*” separately along with reasons behind the merging of the terms. “*Kaji*” will be primarily explained in the context of Japanese Buddhism because Kukai initially introduced and used to the term in Japan in relation to Buddhism. Most traditions of Japanese Buddhism that use *kaji kito* primarily base their understanding of the origins of the term “*kaji kito*” in this context.

The second section will start by explaining how Nichiren developed his own understanding and interpretation of Buddhism through both a biographical explanation and analysis of Nichiren’s personality. Motives behind his actions are often times misunderstood due to his fiery personality and play a significant role in understanding the uniqueness of the Nichiren tradition of Buddhism. After this, we will analyze Nichiren’s interpretation of *mikkyo* and the controversy behind his incorporation of *mikkyo* into his own teachings. Records including a few of Nichiren’s own writings show that he read and studied the teachings of many other Buddhist sects. Analysis of his works helps to specifically explain his interpretations of *kaji kito* and his reason for incorporating it into his tradition. Here, I emphasize that Nichiren’s main objective of incorporating *kaji kito* was for the purpose of bringing happiness and peace to the people. Brief discussion of the *Lotus Sutra*, the main sutra of Nichiren Shu Buddhism, in the context of *kaji kito* will also provide an understanding as to the origins of what he perceived to be *kaji kito* and his own practice of it. The section will conclude by noting how methods of *kaji*

*kito* that were developed and practiced during Nichiren's time remain the same in objective, yet the actual methods of practice have greatly altered through time.

As a result, the majority of the third section will focus on *kaji kito* following Nichiren's death. A historical analysis of this development and change in the understanding and practice of *kaji kito* will prove to be one of confusion and controversy, yet also reflects the disciples' different means of trying to further clarify and spread the teachings of Nichiren. Therefore, discussion from this point onward will focus primarily and solely on the Nichiren Shu denomination, which is one of the original and prevalent schools of Nichiren Buddhism that remain today. This is important to note specifically because of the several branches of Buddhism stemming from Nichiren's teachings that have developed in the past 750 years following his death. A few characteristics of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism will be noted, including the use of *bokken*, a type of wooden tablet, along with *juzu*, a Buddhist rosary.

*Aragyō*, a 100-day ascetic practice that occurs annually in Japan from November to February, is a specific characteristic of *kaji kito* training that developed following Nichiren's time. Because the knowledge obtained in *aragyō* physically defines the present-day Nichiren Shu denomination's understanding of *kaji kito*, the majority of the historical and religious discussion in the earlier portion of this section will focus specifically on the history and development leading up to the present-day practice of *aragyō*. Not much work relating to *aragyō* is known or exists in the scholarly world, which could be attributed to not only the secrecy of the practice, but also the strict regulations of the site of practice (at the Nakayama Hokekyōji Temple), which prohibits entrance of laypeople into specific areas of *aragyō* practice. It is only after completing the full 500 days of practice (meaning to undergo the practice five separate times/years) that the priests have undergone all of the necessary trainings that provide them the full privilege of

conducting special rituals and chanting special prayers. However, since *aragyo* training is not required for all Nichiren Shu priests, and for several other reasons, as we will see, including the severity of the practice, it is rare for the priests to complete the 500 days of practice. The information used for the discussion of *aragyo* was provided by my own father, who to date is the only Nichiren Shu priest living outside of Japan that has completed the full 500 days.

The section will conclude with the discussion of important deities because the base of *kaji kito* focuses on the importance of prayer resulting from connections with spirits and higher deities. Specific deities to be analyzed include Hariti (*Japanese. Kishimojin*), the ten raksasis (*Japanese. Juryasetsunyo*) and Mahakala (*Japanese. Daikokuten*). The objective of this section is to propose that the significance of these three deities are meant to maintain what I see as Nichiren's purpose of incorporating *kaji kito*, which as previously noted, was to bring happiness and peace to everyone.

Although much of my analysis and interpretations are included within the first three sections, the last section will consist of a reflection of my own conclusions as well as suggesting my opinion of whether *kaji kito* in the present-day remains in essence the same as that which Nichiren developed over 700 years ago. The analysis will also consist of my own view of the importance of prayer that has allowed for this practice to persist as well as specifically how this could play an important role in the future of Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

As noted before, due to the mysticism and hidden secrets of the *kaji kito* practice, there are not many sources directly relating to *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism and therefore, there are still many aspects of *kaji kito* that lacked interpretation and analysis that were important for this thesis. Most of the sources that I could find directly relating to *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism were written in Japanese, the majority of which I translated to use in this paper. Thus, few of the

Japanese sources used were obtained during my trip to Japan in December 2011, which was very valuable for helping me make my own interpretations and formulate my own opinions.

Therefore, aside from my own analysis, the majority of the information provided is one that not yet been discussed to a great extent in the western scholarly world. However, because of the lack of information, some of sources that I have used did not include all of the dates, including the birth and death dates of important priests discussed in section three. Most of the Japanese terms used have been italicized only and the *kanji* form of the terms was not provided unless they were important for understanding the discussed topic.

This topic is one that I wish to continue studying following the submission of this thesis because as the reader will see, there is still so much more that needs to be understood about this topic. A greater focus and interpretation could be made on all sections within this thesis, in particular *kaji kito* following Nichiren's death and reasons for the incorporation of specific objects and deities that have become characteristic of the *kaji kito* of Nichiren Shu Buddhism. The hope is that this thesis will provide many with an increasing awareness of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism, but also to clarify Nichiren's teachings and intentions behind founding the Nichiren tradition of Japanese Buddhism.

**PART ONE:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF *KAJI KITO***

**BEFORE NICHIREN'S TIME**



## CHAPTER ONE:

### The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in India

Since Siddhartha Gautama became the historical Buddha and first introduced Buddhism to the world over 2500 years ago, its spread from India and adaptation into different countries and cultures have led to its development and differences in interpretation of the religion. The major branches of Buddhism include Theravada (“The School of the Elders”) and Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”) Buddhism, the latter of which has spread primarily to East Asia. While the core teachings of Buddhism have remained the same, both branches have differing views of the Buddha’s teachings (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: 1-5). Further subdivisions of Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, into separate Buddhist schools show varying views primarily based on issues of canonicity of scriptures and practice towards attaining *nirvana* (Enlightenment), liberation from suffering.

Another important category of Buddhism that developed after the end of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, is that of “Esoteric Buddhism”, which in Japanese is referred to as “*mikkyo*”. Other translations of this term can be found in Chinese and Korean as well (*Chinese. mijiao* and *Korean. milgyo*). The term can often be divided into 密(*mi(tsu)*), which translates into “secret” and 教(*kyo*), which is teaching, precept or religion (Masaki 2004: 5). Esoteric Buddhism in itself generally refers to tantric (Vajrayana) Buddhist thought, focusing primarily on the use of rituals, yet its secretive nature along with focus on translating tantric scriptures have resulted in its lack of understanding, aside from providing a strong sense of mysticism. To explain in short, *mikkyo* uses both rituals and its associated Buddhist symbols in order to portray mysticism. Today, Esoteric Buddhism is a broad category consisting of different forms and as a result, there are

specific forms that also incorporate and emphasize the use of flesh within the practice and others that do not. Further understanding of *mikkyo* requires looking at the historical roots and development of esoteric Buddhism until its incorporation into Japan.

## **Indian Esoteric Buddhism**

The origins of tantric Buddhism stem from India, which many suggest were serving as a way for individuals to observe spirituality by projecting one's fantasies of a radical religious path, driven by a yearning for ecstasy (Payne 2006: 9-11). This suggests a period demonstrating the zenith of Indian thought, which directly preceded the end of Indian Buddhism. Yet, the development and elaboration of tantric traditions in itself result from the social and political factors encompassed by the militaristic rule following the end of the Imperial Gupta and the beginnings of medieval India (500-1200 CE). The formation of esoteric Buddhism in itself could be related to a differing form of Buddhism from the preceding period in that Buddhism in early Medieval India was a "tradition under duress" (Davidson 2003: 111-112). The argument remains that the period showed the centralization of power that would result in the "military opportunism" and become the fundamental core leading to the formation of esoteric Buddhism. Despite the several societal changes of the time, some primary examples included the declination of *madhyamaka* (skeptical) and *pramanika* (epistemological) thought as well as the formation of feudal monastic estates (Davidson 2003: 99). Esoteric Buddhism as a whole encompassed the major aspects such as the ideology and aesthetics contained in the feudalistic ways of medieval India, thus furthering and representing the sanctification of both the society and the politics of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century India. Even within this environment, there were two separate communities that could be seen, including those that focused on either "institutional" or "noninstitutional"

esotericism. While the institutional esotericism was formed by monks within monasteries and showed Machiavellian features, the noninstitutional esoteric ways were led by *siddha* (“perfected” or “accomplished”) ideology, derived from several origins, including not only local, but also outcaste groups (Davidson 2003: 173). The *siddhas*’ main attempts at legitimization primarily included validation of new scriptures and introduction of rituals. Thus, a symbiotic relationship between the esoteric rituals developed by the *siddhas* as well as its incorporation into the monastic communities resulted in the beginnings of esoteric Buddhism.

The incorporation of rituals could stem from the emphasis that Buddhism was to be a religion requiring physical practice. In particular, yogic practices provided a strong influence and altered to evoke a stronger sense of discipline. Thus, developers of esoteric Buddhism saw this as a way to connect both the physical body and the spirit (Levine 2009: xxii)—developing the spirit requires not only spiritual training and practice, but also use of physical practice such as yogic practices.

Aside from the social and political aspects explained, the time period also marked the last stage when Mahayana Buddhism was still practiced in India. Three aspects of esoteric Buddhism emphasized during this time included Buddhist mysticism, symbolism and rituals, all of which contributed to the development and eventual heightened interest of esoteric Buddhism by the common people (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Thus, the formation of Indian esotericism involved communities of monks and *siddhas* involved in developing mandalas, reciting esoteric mantras and partaking in rituals.

The ultimate end of Indian esoteric Buddhism came during the 13<sup>th</sup> century along with the gradual declination of Indian Buddhism. Historical reasons include violence and invasion by Islamic leaders and also disputes with Hindu lay people. However, during this time, Buddhist

followers still remained in India, although by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism in India no longer existed in the same form as when it had flourished centuries before (Payne 2006: 36; Masaki 2004: 12-26). A better understanding of the failed attempts at spreading Buddhism and thus esoteric Buddhism within India requires analysis starting from the state of the society during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when approximately 1000 years had passed since the historical Buddha's initial propagation of Buddhism to the world. Even during this time, debates between Hindu and Buddhist followers remained prevalent, though Hinduism played a larger significance and influence in the society during the time (Eliot 1998: 113).

Masaki states three possible reasons behind the lack of acceptance of Buddhism by the Indian people. The first includes that Buddhism of that time primarily spread among only the educated, separating the common people. In contrast, Hindu leaders did not concentrate on only a particular group of people of a specific rank, yet gave everyone a position and an opportunity to be incorporated within the religious sphere. The second reason included how Buddhism was more secluded because the temple or monastic setting remained the main location of Buddhist propagation. Similarly the priests who were the main propagators of the religion primarily stayed within these confines and therefore, transmission of Buddhist understanding to the lower ranked individuals within the community remained difficult and less common. The isolated setting also did not provide a welcoming or friendly environment for the common people and did not allow people seeking advice from the priests to openly visit the temple. This further decreased the number of people who came to the temple (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Because often times religion provides a place of safe haven and a sense of belonging for the individual, a lack of approachability and friendliness probably provided a negative view of Buddhism. In fact, Hinduism that remained closer to the people would seem to provide a more positive approach

towards faith and spirituality compared to Buddhism. While many emperors had once supported the spread of Buddhism within the country, such kings were no longer in existence during that time. Further, the increasing invasions and battles within India also decreased the number of Buddhist individuals that had traveled to different temples to provide lectures on Buddhism. Agriculture in India, which maintained a stronger connection to Hinduism than Buddhism, became the main political and economic factor that influenced the Indian society (Eliot 2004: 330).

The first stage of development in esoteric Buddhism occurs approximately in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. The most prominent difference between esoteric Buddhism during and prior to this time is the emphasis on the purpose behind such practices. Initial esoteric practice focused on the general notion of attaining Enlightenment and guidance by the Sakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, the practice was defined by the use of mantras, which are words or a specific combination of words recited for the purpose of usually incantation. However, Masaki notes that classification of this initial stage as “esoteric Buddhism” could be too “basic”, since this suggests only the very beginnings of what is now known as esoteric Buddhism (2004: 15). The development of esoteric Buddhism relates to the metaphor of “the practitioner becoming the overlord” (Davidson 2003: 114) and thus could represent the increasing sanctification of the sociopolitical environment of India during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the commonly representative characteristic of esoteric Buddhism is in reference to the use of mandalas, a pattern or symbol of the universe presented in graphic form—often times it in the form of a circle and is primarily used during meditation. Davidson notes relationships of this mandala to the sociopolitical environment where the Buddha, often placed in the center of the mandala, represents the position of the overlord, with respect to the other surrounding figures. In that same sense, using the mandala during meditation

allows the individual to become the controller of their religious practice as well as sanctifying their world that they were living in (Davidson 2003: 131). In contrast, esoteric Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries focused on Mahavairocana, a celestial Buddha that is often interpreted as the *dharmakaya* (“truth body”) Buddha, meaning that combination or merging of the dharma or the teachings of the historical Buddha with the spirit of the historical Buddha. Especially in Sino-Japanese Buddhism, Mahavairocana is suggested to embody *shunyata* or emptiness (Hakeda 1972: 72). Esoteric Buddhism became closer to the common people by suggesting that it would aid in accomplishing their wishes and needs. Thus, it provided a more direct relationship between the benefits attained from the individuals and the individual attaining enlightenment.

Recognizing the rapid declination of Buddhism around the 5<sup>th</sup> century, several Hindu gods became sanctified and incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. Particularly in the case of Japanese Buddhism, we see that any of these deities adapted from Hinduism end their name with “-ten”, such as “*Bishamonten*”, the Japanese name for Vaisravana, one of the Four Heavenly Kings in Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 14). Most interestingly, this was probably significant because Buddhism until that point had focused primarily on the need for individual practice in order to accomplish one’s spiritual goals. However, by incorporating the Hindu gods that the Hindu followers praised within esoteric Buddhism, it added an element of worshipping a higher deity that could assist in achieving one’s spiritual goals. In doing so, however, the notion of praying to a higher deity in seeking guidance made this practice of esoteric Buddhism very similar to Hinduism. To differentiate between the two religions and practice, the developers of esoteric Buddhism included the need for both a meditative and physical connection in the form of a sexual act, a practice considered a taboo in most all religions (Masaki 2004: 14). The sexual act can be visualized through meditation with a Hindu god. Yet this also correlates with the idea also

developed during the second phase of development of esoteric Buddhism during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, which included the notion of the practitioner trying to merge and become “one” with Mahavairocana. The added notion of using sexual acts created the third and what could also be seen as the last phase of development of esoteric Buddhism in India, ultimately known as tantrism or Tantric Buddhism. However, it is important to note that all forms of esoteric Buddhism do not encompass this idea, as we will later see, including early Chinese esoteric Buddhism, which was initially generated from the beginnings of Indian esoteric Buddhist thought. These texts became known as *tantras*, which focused on rituals and rules formulated from the practice of religious teachings (Fic 2003: 23). In contrast, sutras focused on theoretical and philosophical narratives. Often times there is a misunderstanding that all *tantras* incorporate notions of sexual acts, however, this is not always the case.

After the rapid decline and end of Indian esoteric Buddhism in India, remains of esoteric Buddhism were still observed in a few countries. Esoteric Buddhism in Bengal remained in a much converted and altered form, more closely relating to Hindu teachings. Thus, Indian esoteric Buddhism left little influence within the region (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Esoteric Buddhism flourished and developed to a greater extent outside of India even before its disappearance in India, including at one point in Indonesia and Cambodia. A more direct example is that seen in Nepal, where its history suggests incorporation of two types of esoteric Buddhism, where the first and initial type comes directly from India and therefore, a direct continuation of the original Indian esoteric Buddhist teachings and thought after the decline of esoteric Buddhism in India. It may be possible to further look into Nepal to better understand the Indian esoteric roots and its basis for the current esoteric Buddhist teachings we observe today. The other form of interest is that adapted from Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, which developed in the 1950s under the influence

of Tibetan monks who fled Tibet due to political strife between Tibet and China (Ramble 2008: 279). Thus, Tibetan esoteric Buddhism has currently taken precedence over the initial Indian esoteric Buddhist thought and has become the main source of esoteric Buddhist thought in Nepal.

### **Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism**

While many are less aware of the Indian origins of esoteric Buddhism, a more commonly recognized example includes the elements of esotericism seen in Tibetan Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism caught the interest of westerners in the mid-1960s, due to increased interest in Tibet and the trouble with Communist China that was widely noted during that time (Frechette and Schatzberg 2002: 40). Thus, the majority of the information and analysis on esoteric Buddhism in the west is in the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

A detailed explanation of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism will not be provided given the focus of this paper. Esoteric Buddhism came directly to Tibet from India between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, after what was noted as the third phase of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism (Payne 2006: 79). Thus, Tibetan Buddhism is the most “esotericized” or developed form of esoteric Buddhism and also Mahayana Buddhism. One important characteristic of Tibetan esoteric practice includes the incorporation of both what could be termed the “developmental stage” and the “completion” of esoteric practice. The “developmental stage” incorporates the first and second phase of development of esoteric Buddhism, while “completion” includes the use of sexual acts as the final means and the main characteristic from the last phase of development of esoteric Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 44).



The spread of Tibetan Buddhism could also result from the strong relationship between religion and politics in Tibet, which is not or was only briefly observed in countries that adapted esoteric Buddhism. Thus, Tibetan esoteric Buddhism has spread to several different countries including Bhutan, where esoteric practices are very similar to Tibetan forms of practice as well (Masaki 2004: 68).

### **Chinese Esoteric Buddhism**

In the context of this paper, esoteric Buddhism that flourished in China, became the basis that defined the core teachings of *mikkyo* brought to Japan. Esoteric Buddhism was initially introduced to China between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, which was a time when many Buddhist sutras were being translated into Chinese. Thus, the initial introduction of esoteric Buddhism included primarily the use of mantras, which had been popular since the first phase of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism. Initial influence was limited and an increased awareness and incorporation of esoteric Buddhism within the Chinese society came after the 7<sup>th</sup> century, during the Tang dynasty (618-907) and took full effect in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (Linrothe 1999: 11). Within this 100-year period, many changes to esoteric Buddhism were observed, including the development of Chinese esoteric Buddhism that developed from the teachings from the first two phases of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism. The following patriarchs brought esoteric Buddhism to China: Subhakarasiṃha (*Japanese. Zenmui*) (637-725), an Indian Buddhist monk attributed for translating esoteric scriptures, including the Mahāvairocana Sutra from Sanskrit to Chinese; Vajrabodhi (*Japanese. Kongouchi*) (671-741), an Indian Buddhist monk who brought the Vajrasekhara Sutra, a Buddhist tantra, to China; and Amoghavajra (*Japanese. Fukuu*) (705-774), a Buddhist monk translator of Indian and Sogdian

background. Other influential individuals of this time period include Yi Xing (*Japanese. Ichigyō*) (683-727), a Chinese Buddhist monk, mathematician and astronomer; and Hui-kuo (*Japanese. Eka*) (746-805), primarily responsible for transmitting the teachings of Chinese esoteric Buddhism to Kukai (774-835), the founder of the esoteric Buddhist lineage in Japan (Tamura 2000: 89).

Esoteric Buddhism never truly flourished in China. During the initial introduction of esoteric Buddhism to China, individuals were not as interested in the Buddhist notion of attaining Enlightenment, but had hopes and curiosity towards the benefits that they could attain from the “exotic” powers that came from esoteric teachings and prayers in Indian Buddhism. However, for esoteric Buddhism to become prominent in China, there was the need to adjust and find ways to co-exist with Daoism, one of the most prevalent teachings of Chinese philosophy. Daoism in itself used what could be termed as “magic” or “sorcery”, which to many were similar to the mantras and prayers used within esoteric Buddhist practices. Both esoteric Buddhism and Daoism emphasized the notion of assisting individuals in attaining their goals. Yet because the attainment of Enlightenment remained one of the major factors behind the practice of esoteric Buddhism, the Chinese were uninterested in the new form of Buddhism and remained strong proponents of Daoism. Because esoteric Buddhism and Daoism co-existed for some time, esoteric Buddhism is suggested to have left some influence on Daoism (Kohn 2000: 825). Aside from the societal factors, another reason for the lack of spread of esoteric Buddhism results from the persecution of Buddhists under the rule of Emperor Wuzong (814-846) during the Tang Dynasty, which in effect almost succeeded in completely ridding of the Chinese lineage of esoteric Buddhism (Buswell 2004: 141).

The last reason for its disappearance could relate to how esoteric Buddhism held different meanings for the people of China as opposed to several other countries that had incorporated the tradition. When Amoghavajra translated the esoteric Buddhist texts, he made attempts to gain political support for the acceptance of esoteric Buddhism among the Chinese. As a result, he rewrote many of the texts containing segments stating that the purpose of prayers were for the “people” to state that the purpose of prayers were for the “country”. Esoteric Buddhism in India, although not widely accepted among the Indian community, did experience moments of positive acceptance by the common people. By changing the purpose of prayers for the country, Amoghavajra increased the expectations that the political leaders had with regards to religion and its benefits for the country. This way of changing the meanings of the translations to better adapt to the country can also be seen by different translators of esoteric texts. More specifically, Amoghavajra along with other translators of the time added notions including the protection of the emperor rather than the common people as it had originally been written in the Indian esoteric texts, as well as concepts of filial piety, which remains an important component of Chinese philosophy (Masaki 2004: 50-51). By adding both elements, esoteric Buddhism became more popular among both the Chinese civilians as well as gaining support of the spread of esoteric Buddhism from the emperor. In some sense, we can argue that this does not represent the true origins and reason behind the development of esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism later adapted into Japan would encompass elements of Chinese esoteric Buddhism. In the end, esoteric Buddhism could not fully live up to the expectations and promises written in Amoghavajra’s translations and resulted in the decline of Chinese esoteric Buddhism in China.

While this marked the first disappearance of esoteric Buddhism in China, another possible attempt of esoteric Buddhist revival occurred during the Song dynasty (960-1279) when

the *tantras* from the third phase of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism were translated. The attempt failed for several reasons including the unsatisfactory translation by the translators of the time from Sanskrit to Chinese. Another important factor included how the notion of using sex as a means of one's path to attaining Enlightenment did not coincide with Chinese values. Despite this, the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), following the end of esoteric Buddhism in India, Tibetan Buddhism became popular among the Chinese and the initial forms of Chinese esoteric Buddhism disappeared within China, only later to become the basis for Japanese esoteric Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 47-48).

## CHAPTER TWO:

### Introduction and Development of *Mikkyo* in Japan by Kukai

The primary esoteric Buddhist lineage within Japan is Shingon or “True Word” Buddhism, founded by Kukai, also known as Kobo-Daishi (774-835). Kukai’s significance within Japanese history extends beyond his religious contributions as a Japanese Buddhist monk, for his role as a scholar, poet and artist—he is famous for his calligraphy and is also suggested to have invented the *kana*, which is the syllabic Japanese script. His religious thoughts and teachings can be understood from his religious writings, which include some fifty works that emphasize the esoteric Shingon sect (Hakeda 1972: 35).

#### Biography of Kukai

Kukai is known to have studied Chinese classics as a child and upon becoming disillusioned with his Confucian studies he converted his interests to Buddhist studies. At 22, he learned of the Buddhist practice involving chanting the mantra of Akasagarbha (*Kokuzo*) Bodhisattva. The significance of this Bodhisattva remains within Shingon Buddhist practice as a means to fill the empty mind, heart and body with something that is “larger”. Kukai’s own interests in esoteric Buddhism increased when he was told in a dream that the Mahavairocana Sutra was the scripture that contained the doctrine he was seeking. Some have suggested that the Mahavairocana Sutra bridged the gap between his interest in the practice of religion and doctrinal knowledge that he had acquired throughout his studies. For Kukai, Mahavairocana embodied aspects most similar and close to a universal being or rather, a cosmic savior. The

interpretation of Mahavairocana as an eternal and universal Bodhisattva provided Kukai with a sense of inspiration and peaked his interest in esoteric Buddhism (Rambelli 2002: 288).

In 804, Kukai took part in a government-sponsored expedition to China for several reasons, one of which included learning more about the Mahavairocana Sutra. During this time, the sutra still remained in its untranslated form (in Sanskrit) and those portions that had been translated remained cryptic to many. The significance behind the physical trip to China also included the notion during that time that China was the center of the world and thus would provide Kukai an opportunity to become a global and international figure. Upon arrival in China, in the province of Fujian, the passengers were initially denied entry until after which Kukai wrote a letter to the governor of the province, who later granted entry into the country. The passengers were asked to visit Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), the capital and also the seat of power of the Tang Dynasty. The Tang dynasty eventually granted Kukai his wish to study Chinese Buddhism and Sanskrit at the Ximingsi temple with Gandharan pandit Prajna (734-810?) who had received his education at a Buddhist University in India (Abe 1999: 113-141).

Kukai's "initiation" into the esoteric Buddhist tradition would take place after meeting his Master Hui-kuo at the Qinglong monastery in Chang'an. Hui-kuo, as noted before, came from a lineage of Buddhist masters known for translating Sanskrit texts, including the Mahavairocana Sutra, into Chinese. Hui-kuo bestowed the first level *Abisheka* ("esoteric initiation") on Kukai. Some say that Kukai himself had expected and prepared himself to spend approximately 20 years in China to learn more about Buddhism, but within the first few months of his stay, he had already received the final initiation and had become a master of the esoteric lineage (Hakeda 1976: 32). Although Hui-kuo passed away shortly afterwards, he directly requested that Kukai spread the esoteric teaching after his return to Japan. Although since the

time of Amoghavajra, the purpose of esoteric Buddhism was to help the country and the nation, Hui-kuo is suggested to have told Kukai that he needed to spread esoteric Buddhism in Japan more for the people rather than the country, reverting back to the original purpose of esoteric Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 52). To grant his masters wishes, Kukai returned to Japan in 806, as the eighth Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. By this time, Chinese esoteric Buddhism was approaching its end in China, only to be introduced and become widespread in Japan by Kukai. In China, Kukai had learned Sanskrit and the Siddham script, studied Indian Buddhism and also the arts of Chinese calligraphy and poetry. On his return to Japan, he brought back several texts, primarily esoteric scriptures, many of which were new to Japan (Abe 1999: 120-127).

Kukai eventually became head of Todaiji Temple in Nara and performed an esoteric ritual for Emperor Saga (785-842), who was in bad health. This marked the beginnings of the Japanese interest in esoteric Buddhism because prior to this event, many of the rituals were based on traditional Buddhist schools from the Nara period. His popularity among the individuals of the court increased as he wrote poems, conducted rituals and focused on writing his famous works that became primary texts of the Shingon School, such as *Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Existence*. In 819, Kukai established what would become the headquarters of the Shingon School of Buddhism on Mount Koya in Wakayama Prefecture with assistance from Emperor Saga. In 823, however, Toji Temple in Kyoto would become the first esoteric Buddhist center in Kyoto and later, officially a temple of solely the Shingon School under Emperor Junna (823-833). All this allowed Kukai to maintain influence in the court and hold high positions within the court up until his supposed death in 835 (Abe 1999: 329).

### **The Esoteric Characteristics of Shingon Buddhism**

Shingon Buddhism shows specific differences from prior esoteric Buddhist teachings, one of which includes the focus on two specific scriptures: the Mahavairocana Sutra as well as one section of the Vajrosnisa sutra. Thus, no additional ritual or religious practices were incorporated than that which had been introduced in 7<sup>th</sup> century India. The empirical universe consists of five physical elements (earth, water, fire, air and space) from the Mahavairocana Sutra as well as the spiritual element of consciousness from the Vajrosnisa sutra (Matsunaga 1969: 8). The complete empirical universe represents the *Dharmakaya*, which is considered the absolute and highest Truth of existence. The *Dharmakaya* is, as stated before, Mahavairocana Buddha.

More importantly, Mahavairocana possesses the “three mysteries” (*Japanese. sanmitsu*) consisting of the body, the mouth and the spirit, all three of which humans have that define their existence. Therefore efficient practice in Shingon Buddhism requires the combination with all three mysteries of the Buddha: 1) using the body by forming a mudra, a Hindu and Buddhist ritualistic gesture with one’s hands, 2) using the mouth by chanting the mantra or *dharani* and 3) focusing on one’s spirit through meditation of the mind (Hakeda 1976: 98). This further explains the meaning behind the term “*Shingon*” or “true word”—the truth can only be hinted at and thus there is the insistence on reciprocity between the inside and the outside, the exoteric and esoteric, as well as the silence and the verbalized.

The first direct connection between Mahavairocana and the people living in this “material world” can be represented in the form of the *mandala*. Kukai uses mandalas of two realms, termed the Womb and the Diamond realm, which together represent the entirety of the Dharma. While the Womb Realm represents the physical and active manifestation of Buddha in this material or natural world, the Diamond Realm depicts the forever-unchanging cosmic principle



and thus teachings of the Buddha. While both mandalas have their origins in India, they evolved separately and became associated with each other for the first time in China (Mammitzsch 1991: 9).

The Diamond mandala depicts the Five Wisdom Buddhas, all representing five different aspects of the *Dharmakaya*, of the “Diamond Realm”. The observer of the mandala is to focus on the center of the mandala consisting of the “diamond”, which symbolizes compassion (*Sanskrit. karuna*). The Womb mandala contains the Five Wisdom Kings of the “Womb Realm”, who are the protectors of the Five Wisdom Buddhas. In contrast to the Diamond mandala, the focus of the Womb mandala is on the periphery representing the womb, which is a representation of wisdom (*Sanskrit. prajna*). The importance of upholding both wisdom and compassion go hand-in-hand and thus both concepts complement each other (White 2001: 124). The focus on the Diamond and Womb mandala emphasizes the notion that truth is a matter of secrecy, where the ideas are transmitted between individuals—in this case, the transmission is between Mahavairocana and the practitioner through the use of the “three mysteries”.

More importantly, the Diamond realm represents everything that is lit, whereas the focus of the womb realm is on everything that is invisible and therefore focuses on the effective emotion. Because every individual will undergo a different experience during the meditation process, the combination of this experience with one’s perception leads to differing interpretations regarding the merging of both wisdom and compassion as evoked and interpreted by both mandalas. The dualities only exist within the mind and the actual material world that we live in is not dualistic—we only see this world of oneness as representing dualism. The purpose of doing the meditation with the mandalas is to create that oneness from the dualities perceived

in the mind. Attainment of Enlightenment requires the realization of oneness and to go beyond the material world that human beings live in.

This enactment of interrelatedness can be physically observed by the use of particular objects in Shingon rituals: the diamond scepter (*Sanskrit. vajra*), representing the Diamond realm, and the bell (*Sanskrit. ghanta*), representing the Womb realm. The *vajra* was initially a “thunderbolt weapon” in the *Vedas*, yet its use in Buddhist rituals was to represent the scepter of the Tantric path. Thus, *vajra* emphasizes the truth and unchanging *shunyata* (emptiness) as well as the strong nature of the individual who attains this truth. This male component emphasizes *karuna* through *upaya*, activities promoting one’s liberation towards attaining Enlightenment. The female component is therefore the *ghanta*, whose *prajna* is required to obtain true *karuna*. By holding both the *vajra* and the *ghanta* together, this symbolizes the union of both *prajna* and *karuna* as also emphasized by the combined use of the mandalas for meditation (Huntington and Bangdel 2003: 220).

Although Shingon Buddhism is a form of esoteric Buddhism, Kukai notes its differences from exoteric Buddhism. As such, exotericism denounces the notion of secrecy included in esotericism, meaning that it does not require the hidden and unobservable transmission observed between the *Dharmakaya* and the practitioner—in exoteric Buddhism, one can become enlightened through studying the sutras. Although sutras can aid individuals in their practice towards attaining Enlightenment, esoteric Buddhism further emphasizes the notion of a direct transmission (such as between the master and the disciple or between Mahavairocana and the practitioner), which emphasizes the importance of immediate realization. We can therefore define esoteric elements as consisting of the “sudden approach” in contrast to the “gradual approach” of exoteric Buddhism (Hakeda 1972: 63). However, Kukai notes that only esoteric

Buddhism has systematic methods of meditation aiming at enlightenment as well as magico-religious rituals to be performed for secular purposes. He deemed the practice of solely reciting the sutra ineffective without the incorporation of meditation because only mere shadows of the truth are contained within the sutras.

However, another form of communication made by the *Dharmakaya* is through the use of *dharani*, which are said to be secret words of the Buddha. The term itself means, “to retain” in Sanskrit. Often times, the purpose of chanting *dharani* is as a means of protection provided by higher beings. Kukai’s way of distinguishing between *mantra* and *dharani* include that each character found in the *dharani* manifests *shunyata* and therefore the truth is within the reality (Hakeda 1976: 267). In other texts, each character or collection of characters could be calling upon or representing higher beings such as Bodhisattvas that would protect the individual. *Dharanis* were often used in incantations and evoked a sense of mysticism and magic among many (Hakeda 1976: 64). *Dharanis* are included in several Buddhist texts outside of the collection of esoteric Buddhist texts.

The notion of mysticism remains ever-present in Shingon Buddhism, including the beliefs of the Shingon lay people regarding the whereabouts of Kukai. Practitioners believe that Kukai is still living in this moment. Thus, the walking sticks of Shingon Buddhist travelers include the phrase, “*doko ninin*”, which signifies how one is always “walking together with Kukai” (Cousineau 2000: 175).

While *mikkyo* developed under the Shingon School would come to be known as *tomitsu*, another form of *mikkyo* also developed during that time under the Tendai School, which came to be known as *tamitsu*.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### Development of *Mikkyo* in Japan by Saicho

#### Biography of Saicho

Saicho (767-822) was the Buddhist monk who founded the Tendai School in Japan, which was based on the Chinese Tientai tradition, characterized by its focus on the *Lotus Sutra* (*Sanskrit. Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*), a prominent text of Mahayana Buddhism. Saicho had been born into a family of Buddhists and joined a monastery at a very young age. His studies of meditation and *Kegon* or “One Vehicle” doctrines during the period are suggested to have influenced some of his doctrinal interpretations and understandings. He eventually went to Mount Hiei, located on the border between Kyoto and Shiga prefectures, where he remained for approximately a decade. There he read about the Chinese Tientai practice of meditation documented in *Kegon* texts and also managed to obtain several Tient’ai texts that had been brought to Japan by Ganjin (688-763) in 754. Individuals before him had taken little interest in the texts and therefore there was little understanding of these texts. Around 795, the court demonstrated an interest in further incorporating Buddhism within the country by supporting several Buddhist monks and Saicho gained some attention from the court (Groner 1984: 31).

Saicho traveled to China on the same expedition that took Kukai to China in 804. Saicho’s objectives for the trip included developing an understanding of the Tientai Dharma lineage, which would ultimately influence the development of Tendai Buddhism in Japan. Saicho’s trip included a visit to Lung-hsing su, where he met Shun-hsiao, a priest who provided him with several texts and sutras to study. At this time, he was introduced to the esoteric

Buddhist texts, yet discovered on his trip back to Japan that Kukai had already studied and obtained the entire collection of tantric texts elsewhere.

Upon his return from China in 806, Emperor Kammu (737-806) recognized the prevalence of *Tendai-hokke-shu*, known as the “Lotus School” and Saicho who had gained imperial support was also provided permission to establish his school on Mt. Hiei. Two separate ordinands were established, which included both studies of the *mikkyo* curriculum based on the Mahavairocana Sutra as well as the Tendai curriculum focusing on the works of Chih-I (538-597), the patriarch of the Tientai tradition. Similarly, despite oppositions from many, Emperor Saga agreed to provide Saicho in 822, shortly after Saicho’s death with the right to perform monastic ordinations on Mount. Hiei using not the Vinaya Code that had been used in all prior monastic ordinations at the Todaiji temple, but the Bodhisattva precepts of Mahayana Buddhism (Groner 1984: 73).

### **The Esoteric Characteristics of Tendai Buddhism**

Mikkyo or esoteric Buddhism as well as the Tientai Buddhism of China equally influenced Tendai School. Curiosity towards esoteric Buddhism was noted in Tientai Buddhist monasteries in China and thus Saicho was not the first individual trying to merge the two traditions (Blocker and Starling 2001: 48). However, compared to the Chinese monks, Saicho placed the two traditions at almost equal levels, thus providing Esoteric Buddhism a more central role within Tendai Buddhism. Saicho believed that both were necessary components in guiding practitioners towards Enlightenment through a more direct path than that which had been taught in the schools of Nara Buddhism (Groner 1984: 3).

Prior to Kukai's return to Japan after which he claimed the position as the leader of the Japanese lineage of esoteric Buddhism, Saicho had already performed the esoteric Buddhist initiation ritual of *abhiseka* (*Japanese. kanjo*) for the priests of high status within the Nara Buddhist establishment as well as notable individuals of the imperial Heian court. The ritual itself stems back to the Tang Dynasty in China and therefore, it can be suggested that the ritual was further developed upon Kukai's return (Groner 1984: 35).

The deteriorative relationship between Saicho and Kukai is well known in the history of Japanese Buddhism. The beginnings of their failed relationship stem from Saicho's request in 812 to receive the introductory initiation into esoteric Buddhism from Kukai. Kukai agreed and also granted the second-level initiation, yet refused to bestow the final initiation because this would have qualified Saicho as the master of esoteric Buddhism. Saicho continued to study and copy the *mikkyo* texts that he borrowed from Kukai. However, in the end, Kukai condemned Saicho's approach to *mikkyo*, calling it an indiscretion of *samaya*, the promise to maintain the secrecy of the esoteric teachings. It is interesting to note that while *mikkyo* was what brought Saicho and Kukai together, it was the difference in understanding of *mikkyo* between the two that led to the destruction of their relationship (Abe 1995: 104).

As suggested, Saicho himself incorporated the same *mikkyo* teachings as that of Kukai and as such, we also see that the methods of *mikkyo* practice performed in Tendai Buddhism are very similar to that of the Shingon School. However, many of Saicho's own contributions are relevant in the context of this paper and for the development of *mikkyo* in Nichiren Buddhism. As a result, much of Saicho's understandings and views towards esoteric Buddhism will be explained throughout the paper.

Another important contribution of Saicho includes his introduction of the *Lotus Sutra* to Japan, the main text of the Nichiren School. Similarly, the concept of *ichinen sanzen*, which can be translated to “one thought in three thousand worlds” (Matsunaga and Matsunaga 1996: 156), is another emphasized thought within the Nichiren School. The concept itself developed several decades after Saicho’s death by a *tomitsu* priest named Annen. Thus, Saicho’s main contribution to the Nichiren school also remains not only within the confines of *mikkyo* but also to the general understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* and will be further analyzed throughout the remainder of the paper.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Understanding *Kaji Kito*

The definition of *kaji kito* has remained ambiguous throughout the use of the term in the history of not only Japanese Buddhism, but in esoteric Buddhism in general as a result of several different possible interpretations. The overall concept itself consists of two separate terms, *kaji* and *kito*, both consisting of very different meanings that through the historical development of esoteric Buddhism led to the merging of both terms and thus the common use as the combined term, *kaji kito*. Thus fully understanding the meaning behind *kaji kito* and the reason for the ambiguity in its definition requires separate analysis of the terms, *kaji* and *kito*, followed by possible reasons for the merging of the two terms.

The term *kaji* originates from the Sanskrit term, *adhithana*. Despite its several possible interpretation, *adhithana* in general refers to a connection made between the individual and Buddha or higher deity. Some tend to emphasize the Buddha empowering the individual upon mutual agreement in order for the individual to receive a powerful blessing or benediction from the Buddha (Yamasaki 1988: 110). This overall results in the individual having gained a specific “enlightening power of universal Buddhahood” (Winfield 2005: 109). Specific association of *kaji* with esoteric Buddhism can be understood in the context of “*sokushin jobutsu*”, meaning “to become a Buddha within this body” (Winfield 2005: 78). For Kukai, the importance lay in what is known as *sanmitsu kaji* or the use of *sanmitsu*, described previously, in order for the individual to connect with the Buddha and become one with the Buddha. For Kukai, this Buddha was the Mahavairocana Buddha. Interestingly, prior to Kukai, the belief remained that *adhithana* meant the individual only received this power or blessing from the Buddha. Yet, with the addition of



Kukai's notion of *sanmitsu*, the notion of the individual also "providing" for the Buddha and becoming one with the Buddha became emphasized (Fujimaki 2004: 26).

*Kaji* is also further specified as "*nyorai no daihi*", stating the reflection of one's mind onto the water like the rays of the sun of the Buddha (Fujimaki 2004: 27). Therefore, "*ka*" represents the reflection onto the water, while "*ji*" is the practitioner's mind, equated to the water on which the sun of the Buddha is reflected onto (Yamasaki 1988: 111). Thus, this further extends to another important concept of "*nyuga ganyu*" meaning that the "Buddha enters me, I enter the Buddha" (Winfield 2005: 65). This reciprocal relationship helps sustain the exchanging of enlightenment between the individual and the Buddha, also maintaining the Buddha's empowerment and the practitioner's desire to seek guidance from the Buddha.

The general definition of *kito* is prayer and can be thought of as the transmission of energy from the higher deity to any individual or object. Thus, in the history of Japan, the common notion was that prayer could lead the individual to achieve this state of becoming one with the Buddha, especially because "prayer" on a very basic level requires no special training and therefore, people started using prayer to hope for miracles. However, the people knew that the chances of their prayer being heard by the Buddha were very unlikely and thus to gain the favor of the Buddha, the people presented gifts to the Buddha in the form of offerings. They later began to believe that by chanting or speaking specific phrases or chanting prayers, their chances of being heard increased. However, the people understood that the most accurate way of achieving their goals and wishes was to ask an individual with benefits acquired from spiritual training that allowed the individual to connect to the higher deities (Fujimaki 2004: 35-38). As a result, the definition of *kito* is often times used to refer to the prayers conducted specifically by priests who have acquired the knowledge and skill to perform this transmission of *kaji*.

Therefore, the terms *kaji* and *kito* are most commonly used together today, but it is through historical development of both religion and listening to the hopes and wishes of many individuals that led to the merging of both terms.

Many sources show that the combined term has different interpretations, which has led to a somewhat controversial understanding of *kaji kito* among scholars and the general public alike. For example, apart from the “ritual” aspect incorporated into *kaji*, some others have suggested that the specific prayers involved in *kaji kito* are not based on rituals, but instead, evoke magic or mysticism, claiming the term as the equivalent of shamanism. Similarly, although not discussed in detail, the idea of worshipping deities also has its origins in Shinto, as will be discussed briefly in the next section.

**PART TWO:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF *KAJI KITO***

**DURING NICHIREN'S TIME**

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### Understanding Nichiren and His Life

#### Historical Background of Japan Preceding Nichiren's Time

In contrast to the Heian period (794-1185), the Kamakura period (1185-1333) heightened the Japanese realization of the marked beginnings of *mappo* or Latter Age, the last of the three periods marked after Buddha's death, characterized by widespread moral corruption. According to several Buddhist scriptures, *mappo* began 2000 years after the Buddha's death, in the year 1051 and will last for 10,000 years (Wessinger 2000: 273).

Many attributed this largely to the shift in political power from the emperor to the feudal lords that had started at the end of the Heian period. While the Imperial House of Japan had held the power of the country since the beginning of time, by the ninth century, many individuals of the Fujiwara clan, a prevalent aristocratic family of the time, had intermarried into the Imperial family and held high positions within the government. The Fujiwara clan increased their power throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> century and several years after the reign of Emperor Daigo (897-930), Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028) had complete control over the emperor and the court. The power of the Fujiwara clan declined due to primarily social and economic problems leading to increased competition between other powerful militaristic families, including the Taira and Minamoto clan. The Fujiwara clan eventually lost their power in 1068, which marked the beginning of the reign of Emperor Go-Sanjo (1032-1073) (Hakeda 1972: 52). The Minamoto family replaced many of the former positions held by the Fujiwara family in the imperial court and the government. A series of rebellions among the powerful aristocratic families, led to a short rule under the Taira clan from 1159. Their defeat in the Genpei War (1180-1185) led to the

beginning of the Kamakura period and the rise of the Minamoto clan, which marked the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate, a military dictatorship led by the *shoguns* or feudal lords who had been appointed by the emperor (Yamamura 1988: 1-6).

In 1192, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199) became the first *shogun* who established the *bakufu* or the warrior government, in Kamakura. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Hojo clan had taken control of the government led by Hojo Tokimasa who ruled as a *shikken* (“commissioner”), leading to the decreased power of the *shogun*. Despite the increasing economic prosperity under the Hojo clan (Anesaki 1916: 6), increased tension between the Imperial party in Kyoto and the Hojo clan led to the Jokyū War in 1221, which resulted in the victory by the Hojo clan. This war led to the rise of the Hojo clan and the subsequent increase in resentment among many who believed that the rightful ruler of the “country of the gods” (Anesaki 1916: 6) was the emperor, the descendant of *Amaterasu*, the Sun goddess of Japan.

Apart from the government strife, the country itself had experienced several natural calamities, including typhoons and earthquakes, while the civilians died of disease and famine. The numerous civil wars combined with the deaths and misfortunes showed similarities with the Buddhist description of *mappo* and heightened the belief in this Buddhist prophecy (Anesaki 1916: 4). Apart from the rise of the feudal lords, this period in Japanese history was also characterized by the rise of several different Buddhist leaders, whose differing approaches to *mappo* increased individual awareness of the necessity of religion throughout life and for eternity. While the acceptance of many newly established sects of Buddhism was in part, a product of fear, others suggest that the concept of *mappo* was not responsible for the direct creation of the diverse sects and should be labeled a “symptom” and the cause of “exaggeration” for the calamities of the time (Brudnoy 1970: 23). One prominent Buddhist figure of the period

was Nichiren (1222-1282), who is not only known for his emphasis of the *Lotus Sutra* as the exclusive and true way of attaining salvation, but also his fervent personality and nationalistic ways.

### **Biography of Nichiren**

Nichiren was born on February 16, 1222 by the name of Zennichimaro in Kominato, Awa Province (part of present-day Chiba) as the son of a fisherman. In 1233, he was sent to Kiyomizu-dera (also known as Seicho-ji) in Kyoto where he began his Buddhist studies. Five years later at the age of 16, he was formally ordained and given the Buddhist name, Zesho-bo Rencho. In 1243, he left Kiyomizu-dera to study at several centers of Buddhism, including Mount. Hiei. By 1253, he had realized that the *Lotus Sutra* provided what he considered to be the true teaching of the Buddha and thus was the scripture that would become the base of his religion. He officially proclaimed his faith to the universe, heaven and earth on the morning of April 28, 1253 on a hilltop overlooking the Pacific Ocean by chanting “*Namu myoho rengo kyo*” (translated as “to devote oneself to the Wonderful Law of the *Lotus Sutra*”) later known as the *odaimoku*, for the first time and also changing his name to “Nichiren” 日蓮 (日 “*nichi*” means “sun” and 蓮 “*ren*” means “lotus”). The same year, Nichiren started propagating his teachings in Kamakura, which was at the time, the de facto capital of Japan ruled by the *shikken* and the shogun (Frederic 2005: 340).

In 1260, Nichiren pondered upon the reasoning behind all of the natural calamities occurring in Japan at the time and presented one of his most famous writings, *Rissho Ankokuron* (“The Establishment of Righteousness and the Security of the Country”) to the Hojo clan. He suggested that the main cause behind the calamities resulted from the faith of many including the

Hojo clan in *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhism, a sect founded by Honen, who proposed faith in Amida Buddha. Nichiren proposed that the way to achieving peace and prosperity in Japan was by accepting the “Truth of the Righteous Way” and thus faith in the *Lotus Sutra*. He also presented a prophecy that if the government did not accept faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, the country would continue to experience these calamities, including a foreign invasion, which was “one [misfortune] that [Japan] had not yet experienced” (translated by Anesaki 1916: 37). Nichiren’s strife with the government also resulted from his belief in the restoration of imperial rule, which he considered to be the legitimate rulers of the country (Anesaki 1916: 7). This worried the Hojo government and allowed them the excuse to label Nichiren as both a traitor and a target. Anesaki considers this to be the “national standpoint of [Nichiren’s] religious ethics” that also made his teaching attractive to primarily the *samurai* (warrior) class, many of whom were imperialists or dissatisfied with the feudal rule. It was not until approximately fifty years after Nichiren’s death that the Kamakura period would end with the reestablishment of imperial rule under Emperor Go-Daigo and the end of the Kamakura Shogunate in 1333 (Takekoshi 2005: 204).

Although the government dismissed Nichiren’s claims, they along with priests of other Japanese Buddhist Schools expressed rage and anger towards Nichiren, even resulting in the burning of Nichiren’s hermitage in Kamakura. Nichiren left Kamakura and returned in 1261, when he was arrested and exiled to the Izu peninsula until 1263. Upon his return, Nichiren started on his missionary journeys again, yet only a year later, he was ambushed in a Pine Forest at Komatsubara in the Awa Province.

To the surprise of many, the Mongol envoys arrived in Japan in 1268, which correlated with the warning that Nichiren had given to the government approximately eight years prior in

his *Rissho Ankokuron*. Nichiren subsequently wrote letters to the government and his disciples regarding the Mongol envoys for the “purpose of awakening the people” (Anesaki 1916: 53). Nichiren left for a missionary journey soon after for approximately two years before his return to Kamakura in 1271. Anesaki equates this to Christ’s retirement to Galilee before entering Jerusalem for the last time (1916: 53) since Nichiren’s return to Kamakura would lead to his arrest and sentence to death.

Nichiren’s return was overall met with dismay from the leaders of other Buddhist sects, including a public debate with Ryokan, an influential priest of the nobility, who was also considered by many to be an incarnation of the Medicine master (*Bhaisajya-guru*) due to his care for the sick (Anesaki 1916: 55). While many in the nobility also expressed hatred towards Nichiren, Hei no Saemon (Taira no Yoritsuna), a prominent figure of the Hojo clan and a believer in Amida Buddhism, took great offense. He along with a group of soldiers seized Nichiren from his hut in Matsubagayatsu in Kamakura and charge with high treason in front of the Supreme Court. Following this, Nichiren was almost beheaded over the Tatsunokuchi execution ground, yet narrowly escaped death when “something bright, like a ball of fire, flew from the southeast to the northwest, and every one’s face was clearly visible in its light. The executioner became dizzy, and fell; soldiers were panic-stricken, some running away, others prostrate even on horseback” (Anesaki 1916, 58). This miraculous escape led Nichiren to consider his life after this Tatsunokuchi Persecution, as the beginning of a second life.

Subsequently, Nichiren was exiled to Sado Island in the Sea of Japan for approximately three years (1271-1274) during which time he wrote important documents such as the *Kaimoku Sho* (“On the Opening of the Eyes”) and the *Kanjin Honzon Sho* (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”), also gaining several converts. Upon Nichiren’s release and return back to



Kamakura, Hei no Saemon calls Nichiren to the government office a few days later to ask for his views and predictions of a Mongol invasion.

That same year, Nichiren retired to Mt. Minobu where he spent the rest of his life, writing many documents, including some of his major works, such as “A Treatise on the Quintessence of the Lotus of Truth” in 1274, *Senji Sho* (“The Selection of Time”) in 1275 and *Hoon Sho* (“In Recompense of Indebtedness”) in 1276. Nichiren and his disciples also erected the *Kuonji* Temple where he continued to train his disciples and inscribe several mandalas.

Nichiren’s life of strife and persecution took a physical toll on him by 1282 and his health started to fail him. After being suggested to bathe in the hot springs for medicinal benefits, Nichiren left Minobu for the last time on September 8<sup>th</sup>, during which time he would stay in the residence of Ikegami Munenaka, a lay believer of Nichiren Buddhism (Frederic 2005: 378), which is currently the location of the Ikegami Honmonji Temple. Nichiren wrote his last letter and also delivered his last sermon on the *Rissho Ankokuron* here. Five days prior to his death, Nichiren appointed his six senior disciples (Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nichiji and Ni’cho) along with his wishes and tasks for propagation of Nichiren Buddhism following his death. Nichiren passed away on October 13, 1282, surrounded by both his disciples and lay believers in Ikegami’s residence. The funeral was held the next day, followed by his cremation. Nikko took Nichiren’s ashes and left Ikegami’s residence on October 21<sup>st</sup> upon request by Nichiren at his deathbed to be buried in Mount. Minobu at the Kuonji Temple (Anesaki 1916: 133; Miyazaki 1978: 7-32).

### **Analysis of Nichiren’s Personality**

It is impossible to discuss Nichiren without understanding his fervent personality and its influence on outside views towards him and his teachings. As Anesaki suggests, Nichiren's personality and resulting confidence in his teachings were a "product of his time, but he lived both in the past and in the future, being convinced of his predestined message and aspiring for future realization of his ideals" (Anesaki 1916: 3). Many interpretations focus on Nichiren's criticisms of other sects and forget about his caring nature for the people and the country of Japan. Nichiren's determination in his mission to spread the *Lotus Sutra* to save the people resulted in his own acceptance of his martyrdom. As a result, his criticism can be viewed as his way of waking people up to the reality expressed by Nichiren that they were in *mappo*. Nichiren's personality can be characterized by his strong faith in both the Buddha's Truth and the Japanese nation, which allowed him to believe that his work in promoting the *Lotus Sutra* was necessary to lead Japan towards his view of an ideal country. Thus, we see evidence of Nichiren's nationalism that accompanied his desire to spread the *Lotus Sutra* to both the common people and the individuals of the government.

Buddhism during the Kamakura period differs from that of the Heian period, which was for the wealthy who glorified the religion for its aestheticism more than its beliefs. Religion was primarily for personal practice and to aid in one's study of Buddhism. Saicho suggests that in the Heian period, "approaching is the end of the age of the Copied Law [called *zobo*, the second period where despite piety, faith and morality declined], and nigh is coming that of the Latter Law [called *mappo*]; the ripe time for the propagation of the unique truth expounded in the Lotus of Truth" (Anesaki 1916: 5). While this shows the growing concern towards *mappo* that developed in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Saicho's words could also propose how the *Lotus Sutra* would not fully take root in Japan until the beginnings of *mappo* (Ingram 1977: 214). The same

idea is shared by Nichiren, who interpreted *mappo* as explained in the *Daijikyō* (“*Great Collection of Sutras*”), which suggests that the Buddha had created distinct methods of practice for each of the three periods following the death of the Buddha (*shobo*, *zobo* and *mappo*) because of the determined potential and fate of each of the three periods (Ingram 1977: 211). In the five concepts that Nichiren assimilated from the Tendai’s interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, is the principle of “ri” (“*rikutsu*”), which explains how during *mappo* the corrupted people would need a simplified religion in order to seek salvation. Therefore, the second concept of “ji” (“*jikkou*”) emphasizes that the right time to understand the *Lotus Sutra* is during the time of *mappo* and therefore the sutra cannot be taught “without regard to the readiness of persons to understand and accept it” (Ingram 1977: 214). Therefore, having not yet entered *mappo*, the individuals of the Heian court did not find urgency in seeking salvation, although the notion of salvation had been prevalent among the Heian women who sought refuge in Buddhism due to the suggested prospects of salvation despite their inferior status within the society (Yoshida 2002: 302). Yet overall, many can agree that the beginnings of the Kamakura period brought with it a transition in Buddhist thought when the *Lotus Sutra* became a possible method of salvation of the masses.

Nichiren believed that the *Lotus Sutra* was the necessary teaching during *mappo*, a time when religion must be understood on the basis of empirical and logical analysis of human condition. For Nichiren, religion was a way to connect the past and the present through the individual’s awareness of their relationship with “eternal Buddhahood”, which was represented by the Sakyamuni Buddha. Anesaki also establishes that both religion and ethics require the metaphysical relationship between the “Master and the disciples, between the cosmos and the individual” (Anesaki 1916: 68). Nichiren’s view of salvation did not differ from other sects of the time, but only in method of reaching salvation. This included awakening and increasing

awareness of the “Buddha Mind” within each individual and also to perceive the “actual concrete world as the abode of Sakyamuni, filled with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” (Ingram 1977: 222).

Nichiren’s discovery and faith in the *Lotus Sutra* answered his main question of “what is the true form and unique truth of Buddhism?” (Anesaki 1916: 14). His use of the word “Truth” to refer to the *Lotus Sutra* is his way of attaching morality to religion by promoting and living the Truth through maintained faith in the Buddha as the “Lord, Master, and Father” (Anesaki 1916: 71). Nichiren’s faith could be interpreted as a form of trust or faith in the idea that the Buddha would offer salvation even during *mappo*. This notion results from Nichiren’s interpretation of Chapter 15 of the *Lotus Sutra*, “Springing Out of the Earth”, where the “kinship” (Ingram 1977: 211) and “the mediation of human praxis” (Ozaki 1979: 304) between the Buddha and his original disciples, the Bodhisattvas, would allow for the eternal nature of the Truth. In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas would return to the suffering world to help those seeking salvation. This idea is further extended in Chapter 16, “Fathoming the Lifespan of the Tathagata”, which states that Buddha’s teachings are the Truth. Because the Truth is continuously propagated and studied, it is deemed eternal in existence (Stone 1999: 252), meaning that the Buddha’s life lasts for eternity.

One of the four Bodhisattvas mentioned in Chapter 15 is the “Bodhisattva of Superior Conduct” (*Sanskrit. Visistacaritra; Japanese. Jogyo*), whom Nichiren identifies himself with, as stated most directly in his *Kaimoku-sho*. Although some suggest that his work portrays dogmatic egotism (Brudnoy 1970: 37), his heightened awareness as a messenger of the Buddha is evident in his proclamation that “I will be the Pillar of Japan; I will be the Eyes of Japan; I will be the Great Vessel of Japan” (Anesaki 1916: 73). Nichiren tried to unify what he considered “historical reality and the transcendent ground” (Ozaki 1979: 298) by becoming the mediator

between the human beings and the Buddha (Sansom 1969: 424). The “eternity and historical time were conjugated in his body through the act of attaining Buddhahood”, and made him the “embodiment of the eternal principle” (Ozaki 1979: 300). Yet others suggest that Nichiren sought refuge in the historical Buddha unlike the Pure Land Buddhist sect because of this supposed direct relationship with the Buddha (Hubbard 1995: 206).

However, through Chapter 2 in the Lotus Sutra, “Skillful Means,” Nichiren suggests that the attainment of Buddhahood was not limited to the selected few. Buddhahood is eternal, lacking both a beginning and an end, in the same way that Buddha nature is inherent in everyone. Therefore, life is not confined to the period between birth and death (Sansom 1969: 423). Similar interpretations are observed in Nichiren’s understanding of 1) the *odaimoku*, the proclamation of faith in the *Lotus Sutra* (Stone 1998: 139), 2) the *honzon*, the object of meditation and ethical discipline (Ingram 1977: 219) and 3) the reflection of one’s relationship with the Buddha (Anesaki 1916: 68). Further analysis on this topic will be discussed in a later section.

Nichiren’s own background and reference to himself as a child of the common people, provided evidence that attainment of Buddhahood is dependant on one’s faith. Born as a son of a fisherman, he considered himself the son of a sudra, the lowest in the Brahmanic Indian caste system (Kodera 1979: 41). Some suggest that Nichiren used Chapter 2 to emphasize how the believers of the *Lotus Sutra* transcend all others in power, including the feudal lords of the “corrupt” government and the indigenous *kami* (Tamura 2000: 112). Nichiren believed that Amaterasu and Hachiman, two Shinto deities, were defenders of Japan because the deities protecting Japan would also protect his mission of propagating the *Lotus Sutra* to save Japan.

Nichiren’s faith in the Buddha and the *kami* were significant in suggesting his willingness to sacrifice his own life for the *Lotus Sutra*. Prior to Nichiren’s suggestion that he was the

reincarnation of the *Jogyo* Bodhisattva, he stated that he was the “Never Disparaging” Bodhisattva (*Sanskrit. Sadapaributa*) (Kodera 1979: 49). After studying Chapter 20 of the *Lotus Sutra*, titled “Bodhisattva, Never Disparaging”, Nichiren realized that the Bodhisattva’s attempts at propagation mirrored his own and therefore saw the inevitability of hardships in his attempts at propagating the *Lotus Sutra*. He offered gratitude to the higher deities that allowed him to be worthy enough to undergo suffering for such a cause as the one he was undertaking (Brudnoy 1970: 33).

Despite Nichiren’s intentions of criticizing other Buddhist sects to show the Japanese the benefits and the need to accept the *Lotus Sutra*, such actions led to his common portrayal as a heartless figure. Nichiren often used strong words, including “devil”, “fiend” and “liar” (Sansom 1969: 418). Nichiren did not criticize others out of hatred and he himself understood the extent of his perceived ruthlessness. Yet he found it necessary because of the lack of understanding in the Truth would lead more individuals to convert to the “improper” schools of Buddhism. He had faith in the common people in that one day, they would come to the realization of the need to accept the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren states, “I am fully aware that if I do not speak out, I will be lacking in compassion...If I remain silent, I may escape harm in this lifetime, but in my next life I will most certainly fall into the hell of incessant suffering” (translated in Hubbard 1995: 206). Nichiren attached a deep sense of commitment to his actions and mission for saving humanity. Therefore, Nichiren refers to himself as a “*gyoja*”, or a votary of the *Lotus Sutra* after his exile to Izu (Stone 1999: 252).

Several examples of Nichiren’s writings show that in fact, Nichiren was a kindhearted individual who always cared for the well being of others. Nichiren always showed reverence and gratitude towards his parents, master, the emperor as well as kindness toward his followers. He

was always willing to offer his advice and find ways for everyone to attain the Truth. One example includes a response to a woman who had asked him about specific rules that should be followed during the time of her menstrual period, which was considered in Japanese custom to be a form of “pollution”. This notion primarily stemmed from Shinto, which prevented women from entering Shinto shrines (Norbeck 1952: 270-275). The sender of the letter was concerned about her practice and touching the *Lotus Sutra* scripture during this time. Nichiren replies by telling her that there is no need to take any form of precaution and that she could continue with her practice as usual. Yet, he also does not force the practice on her, suggesting that if she was accustomed to not touching anything sacred during this time, she could always practice by chanting the *odaimoku* (Anesaki 1916: 47).

As the example implies, one important characteristic of Nichiren’s teachings includes his suggestion that women could attain Enlightenment, an idea not accepted by many during that time period. Many may be quick to note that Nichiren was influenced by the “Devadatta” chapter in the fifth scroll of *The Lotus Sutra*, which writes about two “disadvantaged” individuals who attained Enlightenment: Devadatta, an “enemy” of the Buddha that commits the five transgressions and an eight-year-old dragon king’s daughter who after turned into a man, attains Buddhahood (Yoshida 2002: 302). This chapter had already taken the interest of the aristocratic women during the Heian period. Thus, while some suggest that women were not officially promised salvation until the Kamakura period, Hongo notes the significance of *The Lotus Sutra* for women of the Nara court who may through its influence, have interpreted themselves as manifestations of bodhisattvas (2002: 51). The excessive mentioning of the story in Heian literary works also proves otherwise (Yoshida 2002: 313). Many philosophical approaches to gender differences were not deemed as significant during the Nara period. The inability to attain

the five superior existences Brama, Indra, Mara, Cakravartin, king or Buddha, resulted from the “five obstructions” in the *Lotus Sutra*, which the Japanese wrongly interpreted as “transgressions, passions, wrongdoing, or (negative) karma that are inherent in women”, even including the “blood pollution” as the sixth obstruction (Yoshida 2002: 310). This furthered the severity of gender segregation. While Buddhism can be interpreted as an oppressor of women (Kawashima 2001: 19), it was the first religion that also offered women the prospect of possible salvation, which increased its popularity. However, aside from a religious perspective, Nichiren’s devotion towards his mother may also have influenced his promotion of the possible prospect of women attaining enlightenment. This will be further considered in a later section.

Nichiren’s persecutions further softened his temper, making him more sympathetic (Brudnoy 1970: 32). One notable example includes his time at Izu, where his connections with the fisherman and his wife gave him an opportunity to learn about people from a more personal connection (Anesaki 1916: 47). In presenting the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, “Establishing the Correct Teaching and Pacifying the Nation”, he suggested the need for unification of the country under the *Lotus Sutra* (Tamura 2000: 101) in order to defeat the Mongols that he predicted would soon attack Japan. Koderu suggests that Nichiren thought that defeat of Japan was necessary for the nation’s conversion to the Truth (1969: 52). However, Anesaki states that he did not “curse his fellow-countrymen and wish their ruin, nor did he believe that Japan was doomed to such a fate” (1916: 113) and trusted that the Japanese would make the right choice for their salvation.

Nichiren’s persecutions as well as his protection and kindness were aspects necessary for Nichiren to deepen his own faith and understand his position as the messenger of the Buddha (Anesaki 1916: 64). Nichiren’s letter to his lay followers states: “...during the 2,200 years since the Buddha’s death, various masters have appeared in the world and labored to perpetuate the



Truth [*Lotus Sutra*], knowing its purport, and yet adapting to it to the needs of the times. The great masters, Tendai and Dengyo, made explicit the purport of the truth...and yet they did not propagate it” (Ingram 1977: 212). Nichiren was different from the Buddhist leaders of the time because of his attempts to revitalize the old and original methods of the Tendai sect, involving the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* (Brudnoy 1970: 28). In presenting the *Rissho Ankokuron*, he was not seeking support for a new religion, but instead identified himself with the “old Buddhism”. Nichiren himself states, “Nichiren is not the founder of any school nor is he a leaf at the tip [i.e. of the branch of some existing school]” (translated in Stone 1999: 261). According to Stone, it was his criticisms that allowed for the creation of the Nichiren sect from an “original teaching”, rather than merely a diversion from the Tendai sect (1999: 251).

Nichiren may be one of the most misunderstood religious leaders, both for his personality and his actions. Despite controversial views towards the result of Nichiren’s faith and propagation, what remains is his lasting desire to spread the *Lotus Sutra*, which is a result of his confidence in the prospect of a unified Japan under the *Lotus Sutra*, and the eventual return of the Truth to the origins of Buddhism—India and China (Anesaki 1916: 124). As a result, Nichiren’s many “new religions” of Japan have incorporated Nichiren’s teachings. This in turn creates a strong view of Nichiren as a nationalist, leading many more to forget about Nichiren’s caring nature. Nichiren had faith in the “ideal Japan”, a country following the universal truth of the *Lotus Sutra* under a legitimate ruler (Kodera 1979: 52) with individuals emphasizing filial piety and loyalty (Brudnoy 1970: 30). Thus, Nichiren should be regarded not only as “one of the most learned men of his time, but most earnest in his prophetic aspirations; he was a strong man, of combative temperament, an eloquent speaker, a powerful writer, and a man of tender heart”

(Anesaki 1916: 3). Such understanding of Nichiren's intentions and his personality come into understanding Nichiren's acceptance of *mikkyo* and *kaji kito* as a whole.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### Nichiren's Views of *Mikkyo*

Much of the scholarship focusing on interpretations of Nichiren and his views have been greatly influenced by his fervent personality and the many “criticisms” he made of the different influential Buddhist sects prior to and also of his time.

One such topic is that of Nichiren's views of *mikkyo*, the esoteric Buddhist teachings and practices most commonly recognized to be associated with the Tendai (*taimitsu*) and the Shingon (*tomitsu*) Schools. The common suggestion is that Nichiren himself criticized and rejected *mikkyo* due to its lack of recognition of the importance of the *Lotus Sutra*, the sutra that he exclusively emphasized within his teachings. The majority of the sectarian texts primarily quote texts of Nichiren's own writings, including that “the calamities [caused] by the two schools [Pure Land and Zen] have no parallel with those caused by the Shingon school; the views of the Shingon school are greatly distorted” (translated in Dolce 1999: 350; *Senjisho* 1275: 1033). Some historians of Japanese Buddhism have also categorized Nichiren Buddhism with that of “heterodox” or “Kamakura New Buddhism” and thus separate it completely from “orthodox Buddhism”, a category that includes esoteric Buddhism (Kuroda 1994: 8-9). This could suggest that esotericism, which was an important aspect of medieval Japanese religion was not seen in the “heterodox” or new Buddhist sects formulated during the time (Dolce 1999: 350). Similarly, many influential Nichiren Buddhist scholars, including Asai Yōrin question the basis for Nichiren's own criticisms of *mikkyo* if given his acceptance of it.

As a result, most scholars suggest three separate phases in Nichiren's life that show his differing positions to *mikkyo*. His initial criticism of *mikkyo* started during his exile in Izu and

was directed against Kukai, the founder of the Japanese Shingon tradition. Nichiren notes how Kukai categorized the *Lotus Sutra* below the esoteric sutras. However, Nichiren was not the first to provide this criticism as this same comment had been made by followers of *taimitsu*. The only difference included that Nichiren provided “*goshitsu*” or “five mistakes” regarding Kukai’s categorization, stating that it was not based on the categorization made by the major esoteric texts. Annen (841-?), a *taimitsu* priest who preceded Nichiren’s time, had already written about such necessary revisions in one of his writings, the *Kyojimondo* (Asai 1973: 681-688).

Nichiren’s second phase of criticism began during his time on Sado Island and focused on patriarchs of esoteric Buddhism in both India and China. Two patriarchs of focus included both Amoghavajra (705-774), one of the Chinese patriarchs in the Shingon lineage as well as Subhakarasiṃha (637-735), an Indian patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism who traveled to Chang’an and translated the Mahāvairocana Sutra. Nichiren criticized Amoghavajra with respect to the authorship of a text that focused on “*sokushin jobutsu*”, a *taimitsu* ideal that was incorporated into Nichiren’s teaching (Asai 1973: 581-587). Yet, Amoghavajra is also attributed with translating texts relating to *hokkehoji* (“Lotus rituals”) and his creation of the *honzon* focused on the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 359-360). This will be further elaborated later in the paper. Nichiren criticized Subhakarasiṃha for classifying the *Darijing* (“*Dainichikyo*”), a tantric text, as being similar to *Lotus Sutra*, yet stating that *Darijing* was more superior to the latter. However, this notion and the differences between the doctrine and practice was noted by Ennin (794-864), a major figure in the Tendai tradition and not Subhakarasiṃha, who had only stated the similarities between the two sutras (Asai 1973: 264).

The last phase of Nichiren’s criticism of *taimitsu* or Tendai esotericism is noted in his writings after his retreat to Mount. Minobu. Dolce suggests that contrary to popular belief,

Nichiren's criticism of these patriarchs occurred before his time on Sado Island and thus although Nichiren fails to mention Ennin and Enchin (814-889), two major figures of the Tendai sect, until moving to Mount. Minobu, it is possible that his criticism of *taimitsu* began prior to his stay on Sado Island. Nichiren's main criticism of the Tendai monks remains that they had rejected the notion that the *Lotus Sutra* was more superior to the teachings of esoteric Buddhism, known as *rido jiretsu* or the "equivalence in the concept of absolute reality of the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric sutras, inferiority of the *Lotus Sutra* in the practice which opens to Buddhahood" (Dolce 1999: 360). Nichiren criticized Enchin for his wavering perspectives in his writings between the prevalence of the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhism, although on Mount. Hiei, the abbot was expected to master both views. Nichiren provides less criticism on Annen, a major figure in promoting *taimitsu*. However, much of Nichiren's understanding of *taimitsu* came from Annen's writings, including the correlation between *rido* ("equivalence of principle") and *ichinen sanzen* ("three thousand worlds contained in one single moment") seen in both the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhist thought. *Ichinen sanzen* in correlation with *jikkai* or "ten realms" (the Buddha, Bodhisattva, Pratyaka Buddha, Sharavakas, heavenly beings, human beings, Ashura, animals, hungry spirits and hell beings) provides possible enlightenment for the beings in all realms (*Kanjin honzonsho* 1273: 702-707). Dolce suggests that another possibility includes that Annen was never an abbot of Mount. Hiei as both Ennin and Enchin were and therefore thought less of him (1999: 361).

In the first two phases, Nichiren's basis for his criticisms was the inability of Kukai and the Indian and Chinese patriarchs to attest to *Lotus Sutra* being the most superior sutra. In contrast, in the third phase, Nichiren criticized both Ennin and Enchin for their inability to stay faithful to the original Tendai teachings of Saicho, who had not made a distinction between the

*Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhist teachings (Dolce 1999: 361). As a result, Nichiren's criticism of *mikkyo* may not have been towards the doctrines of esoteric Buddhism itself, but rather the influential figures of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Nichiren's own interpretations of *mikkyo* were based on his studies of relevant texts, even writing essays such as *Shingon tendai shoretsu-ji* and *Shingon shichiju shoretsu*, in which he noted the differences between *Lotus Sutra* and several other esoteric texts.

In the most recent years, more scholars have provided a contrasting view of Nichiren's interpretation of *mikkyo*, suggesting his incorporation and adaptation of selected aspects of the already existent teachings and rituals of esoteric Buddhism of the sects that he had criticized. Although many of Nichiren's criticisms of different sects focus on its contribution to the "ruin of [Japan]", some are quick to note that this was initially used to refer to the Pure Land school and later also incorporated the esoteric Buddhist traditions (Ienaga 1976: 105-106).

Despite the limited number of English-written sources on this topic and Nichiren Buddhism as a whole, Lucia Dolce has been one of the first scholars to write about this topic in English. She provides her own interpretation on the matter, particularly promoting the view that Nichiren incorporated *mikkyo* into his own teachings. Thus her writings are one of the only sources on this topic of *mikkyo* and Nichiren. Therefore, the majority of this section of the paper will be focus on her writings including my own interpretations on the topic as well.

Dolce pinpoints three flaws in particularly Asai's argument that Nichiren rejected *mikkyo*, suggesting that it 1) fails to recognize the historical moment in which Nichiren lived, 2) lacks consideration of the implications behind his categorization of *mikkyo* as a wrong teaching and 3) denotes that Nichiren did study esoteric Buddhism as well as understood the distinction between *tomitsu* and *taimitsu* (1999: 352). She also challenges the historical distinctness of *mikkyo* from

the Kamakura Buddhist traditions, suggesting that in particular for Nichiren, *mikkyo* served as a means of self-validation (1999: 361). However, this self-validation was a result of his desire to adhere to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and to demonstrate to others, his own analysis made from his several years of study. Nichiren's own background and accounts of having studied several Buddhist traditions and Buddhist texts provide the basis for his conclusions and the criticisms he made. Although Nichiren seemed rather narrow-minded due to his acceptance of solely the *Lotus Sutra*, his acceptance of specific aspects of *mikkyo*, as we will see, are the result of his knowledge gained from his textual study. By considering the chanting of the *odaimoku* and his use of the calligraphic mandala as forms of esoteric Buddhism of the Nichiren tradition, it provides support that both Nichiren's thought and practice convey his incorporation of *mikkyo*.

Nichiren's own writings and autobiographical records have provided many means for understanding much of his thought and experiences, therefore lacks a clear record of his initial introduction to *mikkyo* and leading some to conclude this as his attempts to portray himself as a strict follower of the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 353). However, Nichiren's background and his earlier education of several types of Buddhism give basis for his influences from several sources outside that of the *Lotus Sutra* that helped to formulate his own teachings.

His earliest encounter with *mikkyo* is suggested to be that of *taimitsu* due to his early education at Kiyosumi-dera, a temple of the Tendai School (Takagi 1970: 20-21). However, this did not prevent him from gaining his possible *tomitsu* influence around the same period especially because of Kiyosumi-dera's later noted affiliation to the *Shingi* ("Reformed") *Shingon* School, a form of the Shingon sect initiated by Kakuban (1095-1143), which may have initiated during Nichiren's training at Kiyosumi-dera. He also received *kuketsu souden*, meaning teachings that were orally passed down for several generations. In 1251, Nichiren copied one of

Kakuban's famous writings, *Gorin kuji myo himitsu shaku* (often shortened to *Gorin kuji hishaku*), later sent to one of his followers by the name of Toki Jonin. The writing included the notion of “*tongo oujo*”, meaning that individuals do not have to practice and can achieve Enlightenment after death. This is the basis of Pure Land Buddhism, the teachings spread by Honen and Shinran, who were contemporaries of Nichiren—they suggested that one can go to Amida Buddha's world by chanting the *nenbutsu*, repetition of Amida Buddha's name. More on this will be explained later on in the paper (Fujimaki 2004: 123).

One of his earlier essay written in 1242, titled “*Kaitai sokushin jobutsugi*” focuses on the notion of two *taimitsu* ideas that Nichiren develops in his later writings. The first one is “*sokushin jobutsu*” or the “attainment of immediate Buddhahood”, which becomes especially important in Nichiren's later writings when emphasizing that all beings in *jikkai* (“the ten realms of beings”) with the exclusion of the Buddha, can all attempt at attaining immediate Buddhahood. The second *taimitsu* teaching is the representation of *dharmakaya* (*Japanese. hosshin*) or the “truth body”. One example of a specific doctrinal teaching unique to Mahayana Buddhism is *dharmakaya*, one of the three *kayas* (“bodies”) of the Buddha that is known as the *trikaya* doctrine, which reflects both the nature of reality in the context of the Buddha. *Trikaya* also consists of *Nirmankaya* (the physical body of the Buddha) and *Sambhogakaya* (the “reward body” whereby for example, a Bodhisattva completes their tasks and becomes a Buddha) (Fowler 1999: 227). In contrast, *Dharmakaya*, as noted before, is literally the “truth body” that can also reflect the Buddha becoming one with the Dharma. Specifically in the *Lotus Sutra*, the *dharmakaya* consists of both the *Sakyamuni* Buddha and the *Prabhutaratna* Buddha (“*Taho nyorai*” or “Abundant treasures” Buddha). The *Prabhutaratna* Buddha appears in Chapter 11 of



the *Lotus Sutra* sitting next to the *Sakyamuni* Buddha whom all of the buddhas from the “ten directions” come to hear the Dharma (Frederic 2005: 250).

If not at Kiyosumi-dera, his *mikkyo* influence probably preceded or occurred during his time at Mount. Hiei, most specifically around 1251, the date he transcribed the *Gorin kuji hishaku*, a work of Kakuban. Dolce notes that the transcribed work bears a “*tomitsu* signature” by Nichiren (1999: 554). More importantly, Nichiren kept a close relationship with a *tomitsu* monk even following the proclamation of his faith in the *Lotus Sutra* in 1253. In 1254, Nichiren drew two pictures of Acala (*Fudo-Myoo*) and Rangaraja (*Aizen*), the two Kings of Knowledge that are venerated in the esoteric Buddhist traditions (see Appendix, Figure 1). Nichiren includes inscriptions in the paintings as well that identify himself as being the 23<sup>rd</sup> generation of the Shingon lineage that descends from Mahavairocana. However, Nichiren’s “*Shugo kokkaron*”, an essay written in 1259 during his time traveling and studying Buddhism, also incorporates a *taimitsu* perspective in the form of “*hokkeshingon*”, a term he created to emphasize the merging of both esoteric teachings and notions from the *Lotus Sutra*.

From such writings left by Nichiren, some assume this as signifying Nichiren’s own lack of clear distinction between *tomitsu* and *taimitsu* and thus his classification of all forms of esoteric Buddhism under the term “*shingon*” or “*shingonshu*”. As stated prior, “*shingon*” in the present day refers to the Shingon school. Nichiren used the terms “*toji no shingon*” (“Shingon of the Eastern Temple”) to refer to *tomitsu* and “*hie no shingon*” (“Shingon of Mt. Hiei”) to refer to *taimitsu*, yet never distinguished the doctrinal differences between the two forms of esoteric Buddhism in his writings. Dolce suggests that Nichiren’s understanding of *shingon* can be seen from his “*Ichidai goji-zu*” or his categorization of the different Buddhist doctrines, texts and lineages (1999: 355). In this, Nichiren classifies the *Lotus Sutra* as the “last teaching” of the

Buddha, the same classification seen by Tendai monks to promote the superiority of the *Lotus Sutra*. This contrasts with the teachings of the Ennin and Enchin who are said to have placed the esoteric teachings in the same category as that of the *Lotus Sutra*.

This leads many to suggest that Nichiren focused more on *taimitsu* forms of *mikkyo*, especially because Nichiren did not comment on one of Kukai's most important ideas of the difference between the esoteric and exoteric teachings. However, this notion appears in his "*Ichidai goji-zu*", showing that Nichiren did not ignore this idea. It is likely that Nichiren associated the term "esoteric" with the use of mudras and mantras, which differs from the definition prescribed by Kukai. Nichiren wanted to find a different version of the *Lotus Sutra* in India that noted the existence of mantras and considered the possibility that such a text still had not been translated to Chinese. Another possibility was that the Darijing had been a form of the *Lotus Sutra* containing mantras and mudras (*Teradomari gosho* 1271: 514; *Senjisho* 1275: 1034-35) primarily due to its great similarities in doctrinal teachings. This helped to provide the possibility of categorizing the *Lotus Sutra* as an esoteric text, in the same way that previous *Taimitsu* writers had also pinpointed specific parts of the *Lotus Sutra* as representing esoteric ideals.

This lack of distinction between the two categories is not only seen with Nichiren, but is also reflected in the Buddhist teachings and understanding of the Kamakura period. One example is seen in both *Kakuzensho*, considered a *tomitsu* text compiled by Kakuzen between 1183 and 1213 as well as *Asabasho*, considered a *taimitsu* text compiled between 1242 and 1281 by Shocho. Despite their differences, both texts contain interpretations of *taimitsu* and *tomitsu* (Bowring 2005: 342).

Nichiren's interest in *mikkyo* can best be observed in his own copy of the *Chu-hokkekyo* (the "three-fold *Lotus Sutra*") that consists of over 200 passages that Nichiren transcribed along with notes made by Nichiren himself. Much of the notes state "relationships" that he sees between *Lotus Sutra* and other Buddhist texts that he had previously read. Approximately one-fourth of the transcribed passages come from esoteric texts, including esoteric sutras as well as important points made in essays written by Kukai, Ennin, Enchin and Annen. Although this is only a partial representation of Nichiren's knowledge of esoteric Buddhism, the absence of the his views on both Zen and Pure Land thought has led scholars to suggest that it was written probably during his exile on Sado Island (Yamanaka 1980: 648-650). Although Yamanaka suggests that Nichiren compiled his notes on esoteric Buddhism to prepare for his criticism of *mikkyo* (1980: 650), Dolce provides a contrasting view, suggesting that rather the text was an important way of understanding how he developed the notion of both the *honzon*, worship of the mandala, as well as the emphasis on the *odaimoku*, reciting the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in the form of a mantra (1999: 364).

## **Mandala**

Within the Nichiren Shu School, the main *honzon*, or the object demonstrating one's faith is the *mandala*, which contains deities that protect the *gyoja*. These deities include Hariti, the ten raksasis, the *Shichimen tennyo* and Mahakala among many others, who protect the devotees of the *Lotus Sutra* (Toyoshima 2004: 130).

There are 128 mandalas inscribed by Nichiren between 1271 and 1282 that have been preserved to this day, which all vary in size, format and pattern (Dolce 1999: 364). Figure 2 (see appendix) shows an example of Nichiren's mandala at the Kuonji Temple. Nichiren's mandala

consists of calligraphic inscriptions, in contrast to the pictures seen in the Shingon mandalas. In the center of Nichiren's mandala is the *odaimoku* or the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, *Namu myoho renge kyo*, often called a "*higedaimoku*" for the brush strokes are extended to look like the ends of whiskers ("*hige*") (Toyoshima 2004: 130). This is surrounded by names of deities considered relevant by Nichiren, including those that were associated or became associated with the *Lotus Sutra* during the Kamakura period. The *mandala* itself shows the Buddha's world of salvation, called "*hokkejoudou*", which can literally be translated as the "Pure Land of the *Lotus Sutra*."

Despite slight differences in Nichiren's mandalas, most typically include the Sakyamuni and Prabhutratna Buddhas directly next to the *odaimoku* (one on the left and the other on the right); Samantabhadra, Manjusri, Maitreya and Bhaisajya-raj, the four bodhisattvas mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra* who are noted as the first disciples of when Sakyamuni Buddha attained Enlightenment (Toyoshima 2004: 130); a few disciples of the Buddha; the guardian deities, which include demons; the Four Heavenly Kings; and Acala and Ragaraja, the Kings of Knowledge. The mandala also includes Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun and the universe in Shinto, as well as Hachiman, the god of war in both Shinto and Buddhism (Ives 2009: 33). Within the list of four disciples is the name of the Bodhisattva of Superior Practices, whom Nichiren is considered to be the reincarnation of.

Specific aspects of the mandala are correlated to certain characteristics seen in an "esoteric mandala". One includes *shosonzu* ("charting of the venerables") where Nichiren prescribes the names of the deities with respect to their status that is framed by the guardian deities. Similarly, this is also a representation of the *jikkai gogu*, an important Tendai doctrine that corresponds to *ichinen sanzen*. Nichiren suggests that the ten realms are within "one world", which is represented by the mandala. In *Nichinyo gozen gohenji*, Nichiren provides his own

definition of *mandala* as representing *rin-en gusoku* (“the perfect endowment of a circle”) and *kudoku-shu* (“the gathering of merits”). This definition is most similar to that of the *taizokai* mandala where “mandala means circle” and also assembly where the merits of the Tathagata can exist and gather in one designated location (Snodgrass 1985: 105). However, Dolce notes that Annen was one of the first individuals to note this connection between *jikkai* (considered to be a Tendai thought) and the mandala, by suggesting that *mikkyo* texts also contain this notion of *jikkai*. Annen associated the central section of the *kongokai* and *taizokai* mandala with the last two realms of *jikkai* (bodhisattvas and buddhas) and the surrounding sections of the mandalas as the first eight realms of *jikkai* (Asai 1973: 661-666). Nichiren noted Annen’s interpretation in his *Chu-hokekyo* in the same way that Nichiren adopted Annen’s emphasis on *ichinen sanzen* as being the basis of the correlation between esoteric Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 369). In this way, Annen suggests that the identity of *ichinen sanzen* is “another name for Mahavairocana” (Dolce 1999: 369) or the *dharmakaya*. Nichiren also provides the same claim and thus incorporates Mahavairocana in his mandala.

Nichiren places Mahavairocana included in both the Diamond and Womb realm mandalas after both the Sakyamuni Buddha and Prabhutaratna (Yamanaka 1992: 65), placing Mahavairocana under *funjin* (“emanations of *Sakyamuni*”). Many believe that Nichiren’s inclusion of Mahavairocana was to show his understanding that all Buddhas are *funjin*, yet that Mahavairocana was inferior to Sakyamuni (Dolce 1999: 374). However, provided this argument, it seems questionable that Nichiren would not include the Amida Buddha, who is also considered a *funjin* in the mandala.

This can be understood in the context of *Kakuzensho* and *Asabasho*, both of which contain explanations of important esoteric rituals, including *hokkeho* or rituals based on the *Lotus*

*Sutra* that was popular in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. Nichiren mentions specific details of the Lotus rituals in both *Zenmuisho* (410) and *Hoonsho* (1219). Many suggest that much of Nichiren's thoughts and practices were influenced by *hokkeho*, including the creation of the mandala. The mandala used in *hokkeho* consists of the similar aspects described in Nichiren's mandala except in the form of paintings, including a lotus flower in the center of the mandala surrounded by the respective buddhas and deities. In his *Honzon mondoshō*, Nichiren recognizes this mandala as being the predecessor to his own mandala and Nichiren's use of the term "namu", signifying praise, was likely adapted from *Kakuzensho* (Chaudhuri 2003: 17). As a result, the incorporation of Mahavairocana into his mandala could result from the inclusion of Mahavairocana in the mandala of *hokkeho*. Specifically in *hokkeho*, Mahavairocana of the *taizokai* is the transformation of Sakyamuni Buddha, while the Mahavairocana of the *kongokai* is the transformation of *Prabhutaratna* Buddha, both of which are reflected in Nichiren's mandala.

Interestingly, *Acala* and *Ragaraja* appear in *hokkeho*, but not in the *Lotus Sutra*. The Chinese sources of *hokkeho* include *Acala*, yet *Ragaraja* was later added during the late Heian period (Dukes 1994: 272). However, Nichiren also includes these two figures in his mandala, further signifying his adaptation of the *hokkeho* mandala (Dolce 1999: 373). Yet Nichiren's earlier drawings of *Fudo Aizen kankenki* depicting both *Fudo-myoo* and *Aizen* shows that he found them significant even prior to learning about *hokkeho* and as a result, his early influence was provided by his childhood education.

After Nichiren's death, the mandala was only to be written by the head minister of the Kuonji Temple, the current main headquarters of the Nichiren Shu sect. However, we currently see that the head minister of other temples have also written mandalas.

## *Odaimoku*

Yet along with the mandala, Nichiren's emphasis on the *odaimoku*, an individual's vow to take refuge in the Lotus sutra and the "honzon", also shows esoteric roots. This contrasts from the common belief by many of equating the *odaimoku* to *nembutsu* ("Namu Amida Butsu"), which is the continuous recitation of Amida's name (Sansom 1969: 427). Often the purpose of reciting the *nembutsu* commonly coincides to rebirth in Amida's Western Pure land after death. In a similar respect, some have suggested that many recite the *odaimoku* on one's deathbed in the hopes of attaining rebirth and as a last means of showing one's devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* after death (Dolce 1999: 375; Takagi 1973: 430-450), although this view is not necessarily supported. Others consider the chanting of the *odaimoku* as an "exclusive practice" and thus very similar to *nembutsu* (Stone 1999: 248), yet the explanation of the true meaning behind the *odaimoku* will prove otherwise.

This *nembutsu* is often suggested as a product of the "reductionist" perspective (Toho Bukkyo Kyokai 2007: 36) of the time—vast numbers of samurai were killed in wars, which necessitated a quick and short way of relieving themselves of the spiritual concerns that they had with respect to their life after death. Thus, condensing the main teaching to just one phrase helped the individuals to obtain the feeling that they were not lacking in their spiritual practice or training. Similarly, religion that prior to the Kamakura period could only be practiced by the rich or the educated, could now also be studied by the illiterate who could not possibly read the Buddhist sutras.

Yet, if we correlate the *odaimoku* to its use in *hokkeho*, we see a different purpose of the *odaimoku* and its use of attaining enlightenment through the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 375). The *odaimoku* focuses not only on the scripture, but also the other buddhas and bodhisattvas that

appear within the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren himself considered the *odaimoku* to be the most important and powerful mantra, even referring to it as the *hokke kanjin dharani* (“mantra of the essential meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*”) in many of his writings including *Chu-hokekyo* (Yamanaka 1980: 633), a term that had been used in *hokkekho* as explained in *Kakuzensho* (Dolce 1999: 375). In contrast to *nembutsu*, the *odaimoku* represented his faith not to a savior figure, but to the Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra* primarily because Nichiren emphasized salvation through faith (Stone 1998: 139). More importantly, the *odaimoku* provided an accessibility to the *Lotus Sutra* (Stone 1998: 154) and a thus a way for the devotee to “internalize” the mandala and use it as an object of meditation and maybe even magical defense (Ingram 1977: 219). In this way, the *odaimoku* can represent the seed of Buddhahood and thus a way to purify the mind (Stone 1998: 141).

The five characters within the *odaimoku* have all of the benefits provided by the Buddha compressed within it and thus chanting the *odaimoku* will help the practitioner attain more benefits often in the form of good karma. Chanting the *odaimoku* is one way to save people who are living in in the period of *mappo*. Thus in his *Kanjin Honzon Sho*, Nichiren states that people in *mappo* do not need to specifically understand the meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* or all of the teachings stated within it in the same way that scholars attempt to, yet that they should understand the main teaching, which is to respect the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren also wrote in his *Hoonscho* that the *odaimoku* can open the eyes of the blind, equating this to the people living in *mappo*, and thus prevent people from falling to the pit of the bottomless hell (Hubbard 1999: 210).



## ***Kito Kyo***

One of Nichiren's most important writings that demonstrate his understanding of *kaji kito* is his *Kito Kyo*, also known as *Gokito-kyo*, *Sen-hokekyo* or *Senkyo* and can be translated as "prayers of *kaji kito*". The writing contains parts of the *Lotus Sutra* that Nichiren compiled and deemed important specifically for *kaji kito* practice. More formally, when individuals read the *Kito Kyo*, they make sure to start by stating "*mappo ichijou no gyoja, sokusai enmei shoganjouju kito kyo no mon*", which means that those that believe the *Lotus Sutra* will be able to live a normal life, avoiding troubles that may come their way and have their wishes come true (Igarashi). Those that desire to become *gyoja/gyoso* or practitioners of *kaji kito*, will have to read the *Kito Kyo*, which is mandatory of those that enter *aragyo*, where the *Kito Kyo* is read everyday. Those that complete *aragyo* also hand-copy the text onto parchment that is later rolled up and wrapped in cloth and often strung around their neck when actually doing *kaji kito* (see Appendix, Figure 3). The text itself is considered to have a specific "power of prayer" due to the names of specific deities that are transcribed in the *Kito Kyo* from the original text of the *Lotus Sutra* that promise to help the believers of the *Lotus Sutra*. Therefore, many *gyoja* place the *senkyo* on specific parts of the individual's body to relieve physical problems or illnesses and also to rid of evil spirits that may be causing these problems (Toyoshima 2004: 128).

Those that have the ability to do *kaji kito*, explained in the next subsection, remains limited to the *gyoso*, the individuals that have completed at minimum, the first 100 days (first level) of the *aragyo* training. However, Nichiren stated that those that did not undergo the training could chant the *odaimoku* to attain several benefits. Thus, although many may suggest that the purpose behind the *odaimoku* was because of the emphasis on "reductionist" perspective of the Kamakura Period, Nichiren himself did not suggest that solely chanting the *odaimoku*

would relieve people of their duties in their spiritual practice—their daily actions had to reflect their appraisal of the *Lotus Sutra*. For Nichiren, the main objective behind encouraging the chanting of the *odaimoku* came from the desire of many to live a peaceful life and therefore the fulfillment of *rissho ankoku*, the notion of bringing peace to Japan (Toyoshima 2004: 131).

Out of the several letters written by Nichiren, one of the most important in the context of the development of *kaji kito* within the Nichiren School is called *Kito kyo Okurijo*, a letter sent to Sairenbo, also known as Nichijo, one of his disciples. Within the letter, Nichiren focused on the importance of “*sokusai enmei*” (meaning no calamities and living a long life) *kaji kito* methods and sent this along with the *Kito Kyo*. Sairenbo first met Nichiren on Sado Island, following completion of his training and studies at Mount. Hiei. During this time, he became devoted to the teachings of Nichiren and the *Lotus Sutra*. Following this, Sairenbo became the first individual to have received the teachings of the *Kito Kyo* (Miyazaki 1978: 45). Within the letter, Nichiren included a narrative of *Kito Kyo* and also stated that Nichiren himself read the *Kito Kyo* at least once a day without fail for the purpose of “*sokusai enmei*” and suggested that Sairenbo do the same. Nichiren also noted that since the day that he vowed to become a devotee of the *Lotus Sutra*, he prayed to the Buddha and *Shotenzenji*, deities or the protective forces of nature. Therefore, despite all of the persecutions and problems that occurred in his life, he received the benefits of the *Lotus Sutra* and attained the Buddha’s wisdom, which allowed him to gain more benefits and always avoid disastrous endings or death. His main suggestion included that the *gyoja* should always maintain a strong faith in the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* after putting one’s mind to believing in the *Lotus Sutra*. By devoting themselves to the practice of their faith, one can leave the fate of their life and their body to this faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and there would not be any need to worry about one’s life after death. Nichiren suggested that one should focus on

attaining one's benefits from the *Lotus Sutra* so that they may be able to fulfill one's wishes (Toyoshima 2004: 129).

Nichiren thought that anyone who wanted to spread the *Lotus Sutra* should be provided the opportunity to be taught the teachings in the *Kito Kyo*. Nichiren is also said to have given the *Kito Kyo* to his other disciples, including Hijoajari Nichizo, whom Nichiren sent to Kyoto to spread the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. After Nichizo refined his knowledge of *kaji kito*, in 1319, 37 years after Nichiren's death, he wrote a book explaining the *Kito Kyo* and gave it to his own disciples. However, the book has become one of the secrets of *kaji kito* practice in Nichiren Shu. Several other texts following Nichizo's such as *Kito Byosui Sho*, also explain how to chant the *Kito Kyo*, such as where to take breaths between the characters of the sutra (Miyazaki 1978: 45).

## **Conclusions**

Dolce suggests that Nichiren's purpose behind his criticisms resulted from his need to self-legitimize himself as a religious leader and make his teaching a worthy alternative to the prevalent esoteric Buddhist religions of the time (1999: 376). Nichiren Buddhism in itself could be considered separate from (Kuroda 1994: 20) or rather a part of these "orthodox Buddhist" religions due partly to his acceptance of *mikkyo* (Dolce 1999: 350) depending on one's interpretation and understanding of the term, "orthodox". Although many of Nichiren's writings show his incorporation of aspects from the esoteric Buddhist traditions, it seems still slightly questionable that his incorporation of *mikkyo* was primarily as a means of self-legitimization. Seeing his views, it seems as if it would take more than just *mikkyo* to truly understand Nichiren's thoughts and teachings. Given his fervent personality, it is most likely that his

incorporation of *mikkyo* was more for a means of finding particular methods and ways of demonstrating his view on the importance of the *Lotus Sutra*. As further elaborated in the next section, Nichiren's main objective in using the *Lotus Sutra* was to find a way to bring happiness to people. It is likely that objects demonstrating and providing several means of showing faith in the *Lotus Sutra* would allow a better understanding of the importance that Nichiren saw in the *Lotus Sutra*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### *Kaji Kito Performed By Nichiren*

Written records left by Nichiren himself suggest that he himself performed several types of *kaji kito* during his lifetime. Nichiren states that although all types of *kaji kito* performed by the different schools can be considered as “*inori*” (prayer), the most spiritual power can be gained from *kaji kito* that is performed based on the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren writes in his *Kito-Sho* that the *Lotus Sutra* is the purest and most viable method of prayer, leading to the most benefits—one could be certain about the power of *kaji kito* based on the *Lotus Sutra*.

Nichiren lists four types of *kaji kito* in his *Doumyo-Zenmon Goshō*: 1) if one has a wish that they hope will be granted, then one must have an objective and pray so that the wish will come true (“*kenki kenou*”); 2) if one has an objective and prays, then benefits may come in a different form and not exactly in the form that one expected or may come at an unexpected time (“*kenki meiou*”); 3) one can pray without a specific wish or objective, but in the end, gain some sort of benefits (“*meiki meiou*”); and 4) solely following the teachings of Nichiren and the *Lotus Sutra* will lead to benefits without the need for any extra prayer (“*meiki kenou*”) (Miyazaki 1980: 3). Within these four categories, the fourth type of *kaji kito* is the most important, which implies that one should believe in the *Lotus Sutra*, which will lead to happiness and satisfaction in the next life. Nichiren probably based this on the notion of “*sanze shobutsu*” that is mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra*, meaning the accumulation of benefits from “good” actions, which in this case, refers to chanting and upholding the *Lotus Sutra*. This further leads to the notion of “*gense annon gosho zensho*”, also mentioned by Nichiren in his *Hokke daimoku-sho*, suggesting the increased attainment of benefits in the form of “*himitsu jintsuriki*”, meaning with the help of

something great that we cannot visually see. Therefore, Nichiren's faith and hope lay in providing more people with the opportunity to attain benefits through faith in the *Lotus Sutra*.

One type of *kito* from Nichiren's type is called "*shosui*", which suggested that if upon obtaining the first bucket of water from the well in the morning, if one chants the *odaimoku*, the water will in essence become a type of medicine that will help the individual to escape illnesses and even bad occurrences (Miyagawa 2011: 3-10; Toyoshima 2004: 134). One of the simplest forms of *kito* includes finding an objective or motive for your prayer, followed by spending time dedicated to praying and chanting the *Lotus Sutra*. By doing such, the power of both the Dharma and Buddha will be uniquely combined to grant the wishes of the individual. Although these methods have long existed in Nichiren Buddhism, the practice of repeatedly chanting the *odaimoku* is a special and unique form of *kito*. Because anyone can chant the *odaimoku*, anyone can make attempts to bring their wishes to reality. This is the base of the Nichiren School's *kaji kito*, which differs from *kaji kito* of previous generations that insisted that only those trained in *kaji kito* could effectively use prayer for such purposes (Toyoshima 2004: 134). The times that assistance is needed from a priest trained in *kaji kito* is typically when extra spiritual power is necessary or when spirits are involved, which necessitate a more complex prayer and need for a more effective connection to the deities for effective prayer.

Nichiren suggested that the three important aspects necessary for effective *kaji kito* include faith, the supreme teaching (or the *Lotus Sutra*) and the master or the monks of Nichiren Buddhism. He writes in his *Hokke shoshin jobutsu-sho* that a good master and an individual who has faith and accepts the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*, combined with one's *inori* (prayer) will allow for big calamities to be swept away. He also states that if a person however, does not believe in power and the effectiveness of faith the *Lotus Sutra*, then no matter what Nichiren

does, the *kito* will not be successful. He equates this to how a fire cannot be lit if the rock needed to light the fire is already wet (Toyoshima 2004: 122).

For Nichiren, *kito* was primarily a means of “*shobou guzuu*”, one way to spread the *Lotus Sutra*. While Nichiren rejected all prayers of other traditions, Nichiren studied the methods of prayer and practice of several other traditions that became the base for his confidence in his teaching. The majority of his *kito* is also focused on *sokusai enmei* as noted in his letter to Sairenbo as well as *zaisho shometsu* or removing sins accumulated in one’s past life (Ishikawa 1983: 362). Nichiren considered that by suffering and undergoing his several persecutions, he was removing the sins that he had accumulated from his past life so that in his next life, he could live a peaceful life.

### **Nichiren’s Belief in the Lotus Sutra**

As suggested throughout the paper, Nichiren’s main objective of spreading the *Lotus Sutra* was to save people who were suffering in Japan and living in *mappo*. Nichiren himself wanted to take on the suffering of all people by suffering in their place (Ishikawa 1983: 355). As noted before, when we think of suffering in the context of Nichiren’s life, we immediately associate it to the several persecutions that he faced in his mission to spread the *Lotus Sutra*. However, this type of suffering is different in the sense that Nichiren already expected to suffer in order to spread the *Lotus Sutra* and thus these are not the types of suffering felt by the other people within the country.

Nichiren genuinely wanted to relieve the pain of others in the same way that in the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Jogyo* Bodhisattva saves people from suffering by convincing many to make the world like the paradise mentioned within the *Lotus Sutra*—one in which everyone lives in peace under

the guidance of the Buddha. Once again, we correlate this to Chapter 16 of the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most important chapters within the Nichiren Shu school of Buddhism, where the Buddha saves many people from suffering using his teachings. Therefore, since his time on Sado Island, Nichiren recognized himself as the *Jogyo* Bodhisattva and therefore one of the messengers of the *Lotus Sutra* who was reincarnated to give the people the “medicine” of the *odaimoku* and the *Lotus Sutra* (Ishikawa 1983: 355).

### **Nichiren’s Belief in the Kokuzo Bodhisattva**

Often times the influence of the Akasagarbha (*Japanese. Kokuzo*) Bodhisattva, denoting infinite wisdom, is often noted with respect to Kukai, yet Nichiren also had strong faith in this Bodhisattva. When Nichiren was 12 years old and at Kiyosumi-dera, he prayed to the Bodhisattva and asked how he could attain knowledge to become a wise individual. Upon continuing his prayer, records state that Akasagarbha Bodhisattva appeared and handed Nichiren the “*chie no tama*”, translated as “the sphere of wisdom”. Nichiren felt forever in debt to the Bodhisattva and Kiyosumi-dera because he believed that having the “*chie no tama*” provided him with several opportunities to study many sutras, without which he could not have encountered the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren always felt the need to return this favor by using his knowledge to save people from *mappo* through the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and therefore made his first stop at Kiyosumi-dera upon proclaiming his faith in the *Lotus Sutra* (Ishikawa 1983: 356).

### ***Rissho Ankokuron***



As noted before, Nichiren presented his *Rissho Ankokuron* to Hojo Tokiyori on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1260, at a time when several natural calamities and disasters were causing detrimental changes to both the society and economy of Japan. This included the worsening of the famine and epidemic that started after the earthquake of 1257. Nichiren told the government that the leader of Japan had to accept the true teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* so that others would follow in his lead. Therefore, the acceptance of the *Lotus Sutra* was the only way to bring Japan back to its peaceful state. Nichiren believed that calamities were the result of the diverging ideas of the different sects of Buddhism that were available during that time period also noting that this led to the departure of deities that had been protecting Japan, leaving the country defenseless (Toyoshima 2004: 121). Nichiren knew that Japan was not prepared for the foreign invasion that he predicted would occur in the near future (Ishikawa 1983: 357). This prophecy, as noted before, proved to be correct as the Mongol Invasion of Japan occurred in 1268.

However, Japan was saved by a typhoon that destroyed the Mongolian fleet. Many believe this typhoon was the result of the *kamikaze* or “divine wind” that occurred as a result of the Nichiren’s prayers, meaning that the deities had returned to protect Japan. Some suggest that this was due to the fact that some Japanese had come to accept Nichiren’s teachings (Ellwood and Alles 1983: 324), however, this is questionable given that scholars such as Anesaki note that Nichiren never truly wanted Japan to be in ruins as a result of the invasion—meaning that since Nichiren knew about this invasion, he would have prayed for the success for Japan. For him, presenting the *Rissho Ankokuron* and his many attempts to spread the *Lotus Sutra* were his ways of showing his appreciation for the country that he had been born and raised in. Nichiren’s nationalism is often portrayed negatively, yet in this respect, we see that his nationalism towards Japan would rather support the idea that Nichiren hoped for the best for Japan. Nichiren believed

that the Japanese would come to the realization of the true potential of the *Lotus Sutra* before the foreign invasion.

### **Nichiren's Prayer for Ito Hachirozaemon Tsukemitsu at Izu**

A few months after Nichiren's exile to Izu in 1261, a regent of Izu by the name of Ito Hachirozaemon Tsukemitsu visited Nichiren to ask him to do a *kito* prayer in hopes of alleviating his poor health conditions. Nichiren refused at first because he thought that Ito lacked devotion towards the *Lotus Sutra*, especially because Ito was a firm believer of the Amida Buddha and thus chanted *nembutsu*. As time progressed, Ito seemed to gain more respect towards Nichiren's teachings and the *Lotus Sutra* so Nichiren accepted his request (Miyagawa 2011: 6-7). Nichiren performed his *kaji kito* by asking for the assistance of the ten raksasis, Hariti and the deities of Japan. Although the specifics of Nichiren's actions remain uncertain, records state that Nichiren's prayers were heard and Ito's illness was cured. Grateful for Nichiren's prayer, Ito presented Nichiren with a statue of a standing Buddha found in the ocean, possibly by a fellow fisherman who caught it in his fishing net while out at sea (Ishikawa 1983: 357; Miyagawa 2011: 6-7; Toyoshima 2004: 121). Nichiren kept the idol with him for the rest of his life and became his most important idol that he would label as his *honzon*. Even in his will, Nichiren mentioned his wishes to be buried at Mount. Minobu with both the *Chu-hokekyo* and the status of the Buddha to be placed close by. Although Nichiren was buried in Mount. Minobu as hoped, Nichiro, one of Nichiren's disciples who had been given the duty to protect the grave, took the statue outside of the confines of Mount. Minobu 100 days after Nichiren's death and to the Hongokuji Temple in present-day Kyoto, where many suggest the statue remains today (Miyagawa 2011: 6-7).

## Prayers for Health-Related Issues

It was common for Nichiren to pray for people with poor health by asking certain deities for spiritual guidance. Nichiren often suggested that individuals who could not physically visit him should write their name and year of birth on a piece of paper and send the information to him. Nichiren would then pray to the sun and moon so that their illness would be cured dependant upon the strength of the individual's faith in the *Lotus Sutra* (Ishikawa 1983: 363).

Nichiren's *kaji kito* conducted for his mother remains one of Nichiren's most famous prayers. After Nichiren returned to mainland Japan following his exile to Izu in 1264, Nichiren knew that he had to visit the shogun again to convince him of the need to accept the *Lotus Sutra*. Expecting that this would lead to more complications in his life, he decided to stop by Kiyosumidera where his master Dozenbo still remained as the head priest, with intentions to convert him to the *Lotus Sutra*. On the way, he was also determined to visit his parents and therefore returned to his hometown in Kominato, Chiba. However, when he returned to his parents' house, he found that his mother was on the verge of dying and she took her last breath the moment he arrived at the house. Nichiren wanted to save his mother and prayed by reading one important passage from Chapter 23 ("The Former Deeds of the Medicine King Bodhisattva") of the *Lotus Sutra* and slowly poured water into his already-deceased mother's mouth. Nichiren wrote in his *Kaen jyogo sho* that his mother came back to life and lived for another four more years (Ishikawa 1983: 357-358).

The last *kaji kito* that Nichiren performed in his lifetime was for Nanjyo Tokimitsu in 1282, which was very similar to the prayer he conducted for his mother. By this time, Nichiren was approaching his death and he was in poor health due to all of the physical hardships that had finally taken a toll on him—he was physically thin and licked *miso* (soybean paste made by

fermentation) for medicinal benefits because yeast fungus generated during the fermentation process was suggested by many to be effective for several illnesses. One day, one of his disciples, Nikko, brought a request that he had received from an ill lay follower, Nanjyo Tokimitsu who wanted Nichiren to perform *kito* so as to cure his illness. Nichiren asked another disciple, Nichiro, to transcribe a letter to Nanjyo for him. In the letter, Nichiren thanked Nanjyo for the horse that Nanjyo had sent as a way of showing his appreciation for agreeing to conduct the *kito* prayer, along with instructions for the *kaji kito*. At that time, Nichiren had already taught Nikko how to make and use *gofu*, which is a type of token that is used for protection. The *gofu* differs in all schools of Buddhism, yet in the Nichiren School, this is understood to be made out of a piece of paper often folded in a specific way. Nichiren asked that Nikko visit Nanjyo and conduct the *kaji kito* as stated in the letter (Miyagawa 2011: 8).

Nikko arrived at Nanjyo's house and started the *kaji kito* process by writing down the *kyomon*, which are 28 important Chinese characters within the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* on a piece of *washi*, or "Japanese paper" made using traditional methods. The characters together were read as follows: *shikyosoki, enbudainin, byoshiryoyaku, nyakunin ubyo, tokubun zekyo, byosoku shometsu* and *furofushi* (Toyoshima 2004: 121). Nikko burned this piece of paper and turned it into ashes. Nichiren specified that Nikko obtain pure water in the amount of one *gou* (equivalent to 0.18 liters) from a well between the times of 4:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. into which Nikko would pour the ashes and ask Nanjyo to drink it. This information is written in the *Kokiko gobo goshosoku* written by Nichiren himself (Toyoshima 2004: 122). For some time, it was uncertain from what source Nichiren had specifically obtained the information about the specific time that he had specified the water had to be obtained, however, now it is suggested that he obtained it from the *Kokuzo-Kumonjihou* (Miyagawa 2011: 8-9). When Nichiren saved his

mother, he is said to have performed *kaji kito* in the exact same way, including pouring the burnt ashes of the paper with the *kyomon* into the water that he poured into his mother's mouth. Interestingly, Nichiren also conducted the same type of *kaji kito* for expecting mothers so that the baby and mother would have a safe delivery (Ishikawa 1983: 364). Even today in the Nichiren School, *gofu* is an object that can be swallowed, although the practice of burning paper and swallowing ashes is often times no longer part of the process. Aside from the *gofu*, Nichiren also describes in his *Kyodo no Gohenji* that he also made *omamori*, a type of charm for individuals who wanted protection from *Shontenzenjin* or the Buddha. Nichiren always inscribed a *mandala* within the *omamori*, which was then folded and worn around the neck (Stone 1998: 153).

### **Rain Prayer**

In the summer of 1271, the Japanese government was concerned with all of the droughts that were taking place in Japan and asked Ryokan, a Shingon priest, to perform a rain prayer. Nichiren challenged Ryokan stating that if after seven days of the rain *kaji kito*, if there was rain, Nichiren would accept Ryokan as the winner and Nichiren would admit that the *Lotus Sutra* was not the right teaching. However, if Nichiren won, Ryokan would become Nichiren's disciple and accept the *Lotus Sutra* as the right teaching. After seven days, people saw no rain and the conditions only worsened resulting in typhoons. Nichiren stated that the inability of Ryokan to bring rain shows how incompetent he is in saving the people. After Ryokan's loss, Nichiren is said to have taught him *jobutsu*, the way to become a Buddha along with how to do a rain prayer (Ishikawa 1983: 358).

## Conclusion

Aside from the types of *kaji kito* mentioned above, Nichiren is also known for several other types of prayer. Through *kito* it seems as if Nichiren tried to maintain a strong relationship with the deities that he considered important for his propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*. As a result, often times his conversations with the deities are also considered by some to be a form of his prayer. Such examples include the several times that Nichiren scolded deities for putting him in dangerous situations that prevented him from spreading the *Lotus Sutra*. This includes in 1271 when he scolded Hachiman and Amaterasu before arriving at the Tatsunokuchi execution ground telling them that they had broken their promise that they had made with the Buddha around the 1<sup>st</sup> century, to protect the believers of the *Lotus Sutra*. He stated that upon his execution he would go straight to the Buddha and report to him that they had broken their vows. As legend has it, a lightning bolt struck the executioner moments before lowering his sword to behead Nichiren and thus he was saved (Ishikawa 1983: 359). Several stories similar to these exist and have become major examples of Nichiren's own strong faith in these spiritual deities to help him in his journey. Nichiren trusted that he had a strong bond and maintained communication with the deities that would allow him to pursue his mission as the propagator of the *Lotus Sutra* and save Japan from the calamities that they were experiencing. Throughout his life, Nichiren maintained his view on the importance of both *kaji kito* to protect Japan (Ienaga 1976: 105-106) and *kaji kito* for the lay people, allowing many to use this as evidence of his inevitable incorporation of *mikkyo* into his own teachings.

**PART THREE:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF *KAJI KITO***

**AFTER NICHIREN'S DEATH**

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### History of *Kaji Kito* in the Nichiren School

Nichiren's death did not mark an end to his propagated teachings and the core basis that he had established regarding *kaji kito* of the Nichiren Shu sect. However, this did not prevent the formation and eventual development of different forms of *kaji kito*. The two separate forms that developed can be called the “*Nakayama*” form and the “*Minobu-san*” (or “Mount. Minobu”) form. The initial split and divergence of the two methods began with the different interpretations regarding which disciple of Nichiren received the teaching of *kaji kito* directly from Nichiren himself. We will see that a compilation of several chosen aspects from the two forms have resulted in the important attributes and characteristics of Nichiren Shu *kaji kito* methods today.

#### **The *Mount. Minobu* Method**

Initial development of *kaji kito* practice and understanding on Mount. Minobu is based on the notion that Nichiren taught his disciple and eventual successor at the Kuonji Temple in Mount. Minobu, the secrets and methods involved in *kaji kito*. This linear transmission of the method from master to disciple continued until Hojuin Nichiden, the 13<sup>th</sup> successor of the Kuonji Temple. After Nichiden's time as head minister of the Kuonji Temple, more individuals were provided opportunities to learn *kaji kito* methods, which he titled as the “*Shakuzenbo*” method, named after the Shakuzenbo Temple, another temple within Mount. Minobu that was erected during this time. However, after Nichiden's death on December 11, 1526, the practice waned and ceased development and even existence for some time. Shinshouin Nichien, the 22<sup>nd</sup> successor of



the Kuonji Temple, eventually resumed the *Shakuzenbo* method (Toyoshima 2004: 119-134; Miyazaki 1980: 162-173).

Historical significance of Mount. Shichimen, a notable location of *aragyō* practice in the Yamanashi Prefecture, results from the efforts of Sennobou Nichiei, suggested to have trained for 3000 days at Mount. Shichimen. Many recognize him as the founder of “*aragyō*” or ascetic training and practice, although the practice itself is better associated the 10<sup>th</sup> successor of the Shakuzenbo temple, Senjuin Nichikan, who emphasized the use of *bokken*, a wooden object used in Nichiren Shu *kaji kito* practice. The first *bokken* was made from the branch, yet further discussion of *bokken* will be provided later in the paper. Under the guidance of Nichikan, Kanjiin Nisso completed 1000 days of *aragyō* practice on Mount. Shichimen. The *kito* methods that he learned received the name, the “*Santaku*” method (Miyazaki 1980: 193).

Tsuumyoin Nichiryu also climbed Mount. Shichimen some time during the beginning of the Edo period (1603-1868) and trained throughout the summer and the winter. Both individuals gained the power of *Shichimen dai myojin*, a deity said to live on the mountain. The power of *kaji kito* obtained would allow them to perform the following “miracles”: cure illnesses, send away bad spirits, relieve the pain of child labor and avoid misfortune. One of the better-known examples includes having cured the illness of Matsudaira Sadayoshi, the son of Matsudaira Sadatsuna (1592-1652) of the Kuwano Castle in Shizuoka. More importantly, several sub-denominations of *kaji kito* practice developed within Nichiren Shu, particularly during the Edo Period. The commonality among these denominations included a strong faith and use of *Lotus Sutra* for the basis of their *kaji kito* that they performed (Toyoshima 2004: 133).

A reversion back to *Shakuzenbo* methods occurred during the time of the 22<sup>nd</sup> successor of the Shakuzenbo Temple, Fumounin Nichiken who relocated and renovated the Shakuzenbo

Temple from western to southern Minobu in 1819. In the process, he also reorganized the *densho*, books written regarding methods of *kaji kito*, as well as organizing the chronology in which they should be taught (Miyazaki 1980: 165-170). Nichiken wrote that the *aragyō* training should be divided into three separate levels, each level consisting of 1000 days of practice, for a grand total of 3000 days of practice required to fully master the *kaji kito* methods. The three stages were subsequently given the names *shogyō* for the first 1000 days, *saigyō* for the second and *mangyō* for the third. It is possible that the emphasis on separating the levels by 1000 days was influenced by Tendai Buddhism's 1000 days of ascetic practice called "*Sennichi Kaihō-gyō*" (Miyazaki 1980: 162-170).

Nichiken is also associated with a famous *kaji kito* that he performed at Mount. Minobu when individuals of the town were suffering from an epidemic. Nichiken made a *heisoku*, a white paper cut and folded in a certain way and often times placed on a wooden stand. The *kami* or spirits are said to reside on the *heisoku* when called upon by the practitioner. This use of *heisoku* can probably be associated with adaptation of the cutting and use of white paper in Shinto. Nichiken threw the *heisoku* into the river and performed an action, known as "*kuji wo kiru*", meaning to swiftly make nine separate strokes with one's hand. Often times each stroke is associated with a certain step of writing an important *kanji* for the practice and is used for the purpose of sending away bad spirits. The *heisoku* is said to have flowed in opposite direction of the current and the epidemic ceased (Toyoshima 2004: 126).

The training of the *Shakuzenbo* method primarily consisted of learning how to make the *heisoku* as well as verbally learning the *kaji kito* methods of practice through *kuden* or "verbal transmission", the traditional way in which rituals associated with Esoteric Buddhism in had been passed down since its beginnings in India. Even when the individual accomplished

performing a very hard *kito*, the individual was forced to do 1000 days of ascetic practice. The methods of training consisted of praying and learning *kito* methods as well as seven separate water prayers per day as a means of purifying one's spirit and soul. The practitioners were also required to do another separate water prayer every time they entered the bathroom. The individual finally received teachings from important texts, including the *Kito kyo*, written by Nichiren himself as well as *Kito byosuisho* (Miyazaki 1980: 45; Kageyama 1974: 377), after completion of *mangyo*. Despite allowing more individuals to learn the *kaji kito* practice, the *Shakuzenbo* method required that the teaching and training be done one-on-one, still maintaining the secretive nature of the practice in this restrictive way. As a result, the *Shakuzenbo* method disappeared after the time of Shakuzenbo Temple's 29<sup>th</sup> successor, Taienin Nissei, during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912).

Aside from this, another main form of *kito* included the *Yuikanbo* method developed during the mid-Edo Period (1603-1868) by Yuikanbou Nichiyu, a priest from Shimofusa in Chiba Prefecture. In 1680, Nichiyu completed 100 days of *aragyo* and received the *Kito Kyo*. Interestingly, he chose important teachings within the *Lotus Sutra* and told his disciples that individuals who perform the *kaji kito* prayer should not just try to study Nichiren's teachings or simply rely and copy the teachings of "stupid" priests because it would result in the accumulation of possibly wrong teachings. He emphasized the importance of purifying one's mind in order to achieve Enlightenment. Kakuyouin Nichiei also tried to emphasize and spread the *Yuikanbo* method at the Honzuiji Temple in Kyoto, yet this attempt ended in failure (Toyoshima 2004: 136)

Following this, the main form of practice became the *Ichidouin* method that was practiced by Nippo, the 22<sup>nd</sup> successor of the Kishinobou Temple in Mount. Minobu. Nippo's

primary temple was the Honzouji Temple in Kyoto, whose name was eventually changed to the Ichidouin Temple. Genrei Joukou, the emperor at the time, praised Nippo, who had completed 1000 days of *aragyō* at the Kamogawa River. Nippo eventually returned to Yamanashi where he brought fame to the Shofukuji Temple, which currently holds Nippo's book consisting of information including instructions on how to make *gofu*.

Needless to say, the different methods explained above are all under the broad category of the “*Mount. Minobu*” method showing that this method underwent several changes throughout its history. However, due to the lack of significance of several of the methods, the *Shakuzenbou* method has become the main method associated with the *Mount. Minobu* method.

### **Nakayama Method**

The basis of the *Nakayama* form can be attributed to Toki Jonin, a warrior of the Kamakura period who became a devotee of Nichiren Buddhism initially as a lay follower and later became a monk by the name of Nichijo. The history and the base of *Nakayama* form are observed in the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple in Chiba Prefecture. The temple itself resulted from the merging of the Shimousa Hokkeji Temple built by Nichijo as well as Honmyoji Temple started by Nikko, Nichijo's follower. Many say that Nichiren personally taught his secrets and methods of *kaji kito* to Nichijo, as would the subsequent Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple's successor and high priest learn from the previous high priest of the temple (Toyoshima 2004: 119). Thus here we see the notion of *hiden* or “secret teachings” that were passed on from master to disciple.

Nichigon, the 10<sup>th</sup> successor and high priest of the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple decided that all of the educated individuals should be provided the opportunity to learn the privileged

teachings of Nichiren Buddhist *kaji kito*. Since then, the temple's head minister was given the name "*kanju*" or "*denshi*" who is responsible for teaching the *kaji kito* methods. The "*fuku-denshi*", second in status to the *kanshu*, also maintained the role as the supporter of the head minister. The pivotal changes during this time include the privilege provided to more individuals to learn the *kaji kito* methods, while still maintaining the notion of hidden practice and transmission to only to the designated and selected few.

Upon becoming the *kanju*, Kyoin Nissho, the 14<sup>th</sup> successor of Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple and also the 7<sup>th</sup> successor of the Nakayama Taifukuji Temple, changed his name from Nissho to Hoshoin Nittai. The major turning point during his time as *kanju* included the establishment of *Enritsubo*, a building for solely *aragyō* practice and learning *kaji kito* methods, in 1633. *Enritsubo* became the main location for *aragyō* practice led by the *kanju* and would eventually be renamed as *Onjuin* after Onjuin Nichikyu (1662-1727), the third head minister of the Onjuin temple who completed 1000 days of *aragyō* practice and upon completion, compiled *Kito-shoden-sho* ("The sacred book on the transmission of prayers") (Miyazaki 1980: 174-187).

While Nittai remains the established founder of *Enritsubo*, Onjuin Nichikyu, the third *kanju* of the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple since the establishment of *Enritsubo*, trained under Nittai. By 1692, Nichikyu became the first individual to learn all the *Nakayama* methods of *kaji kito*. Most of the methods that were taught to Nichikyu still remain within the curriculum of *aragyō* that continues today (Toyoshima 2004: 124). Upon finishing his studies at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple, Nichikyu traveled to Mount. Minobu and trained there for a total of three years. Within those three years, he climbed Mount. Shichimen seven separate times and conducted 100 days of *sanro*, a term used to denote praying in the temple from dusk till dawn. Afterwards, he trained and personally learned the *Mount. Minobu* method of *kaji kito* from

Magyoin Nichijun, the *kanju* of ascetic training of the *Shakuzenbo* method. Nichijun taught Nichikyu the most secretive *Mount Minobu* methods, which differed from the *Nakayama* method especially because it consisted of methods that differed from *kaji kito* methods that Nichiren had taught in his lifetime. Before his passing in 1727, Nichikyu compiled all of the *kaji kito* methods he learned both at Mount. Minobu and at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple in *Nakayama Hongaku Goshinho*, a text which became the basis for the development of present-day *kaji kito* methods.

Gyogakuin Nicho, the 25<sup>th</sup> successor of the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple was concerned that the *kaji kito* methods taught at *Onjuin* would eventually disappear, and encouraged his disciple, Chisenin Nichiju, to prepare for the time when *Onjuin* may shut down. By 1644, Nichiju established a separate building, called *Chisenin*. Although several sources provide different understandings of Nichiju's training, the common belief is that Nichiju learned *kaji kito* methods with Nichikyu from Hoshoin Nittai. However, Nichou's concerns led to a significant change—individuals from different groups belonging to the Nichiren tradition were also allowed to enter *aragyo* to learn the Nichiren *kaji kito* methods (Miyazaki 1980: 162-173). This particular emphasis on belief in the *Lotus Sutra* may stem from Nichiren's own insistence that individuals who ask him to perform *kaji kito* show and maintain belief in the *Lotus Sutra*. However, this change also simply signifies the existence of different methods of *kaji kito* within each of these groups. For example, Jintsuin Nikko, an individual from the *Myomanji* group (not Nichiren Shu) who knew what was called the “*Nichiju mon*” method of *kaji kito* entered *Onjuin*. Yet, during this time, he not only learned the *Nakayama* method, but also took on the roll of teaching the *Nichiju monryu* method. Similar examples are noted for the “*Chisenin*” method of *kaji kito*.

This new movement suggests that the current Nichiren *kaji kito* that remains today developed from incorporating several different methods and ideals. However, more importantly, the distinct characteristic of the *Nakayama* method of *kaji kito* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century included the efforts taken to make *kaji kito* more accessible to the common people. By performing *kaji kito* for the common people and also believers of Nichiren Buddhism, the *Nakayama* method became better known within the society. Similarly, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the end of the Edo Period, priests who trained at both *Onjuin* and *Chisenin* were recognized in *Minobu Shakuzenbou-ryu kito soujou no koto* and individuals teaching the *Mount. Minobu* method as “*Nakayama no ryogensha*” or “individuals that have learned both the *Nakayama* and *Mount. Minobu* methods of *kaji kito*”. At this point in time, we observe both the merging of both prominent methods of Nichiren Shu *kaji kito*, which led to the development of the current understanding of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

At one point, *kaji kito* of the Nichiren School had the support of the emperor, aristocrats and the government. For example, after *kaji kito* resulted in the safe return of an exiled emperor in 1334, the imperial family awarded land to the Myokenji Temple in Kyoto (Hardacre 1982: 309). Another notable example is the sponsorship of Nichiren *kaji kito* by the Tokugawa shogunate, which began when Nichiju saved the daughter of Tokugawa Ieyasu from an illness (Kageyama 1974: 381-383). This connection continued primarily because the women of the *ooku*, a harem located within the Edo castle, maintained belief in Nichiren Buddhism and continued to send rice to the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple in return for the continued *kito* prayer performed by the priests at the temple. Sometimes the women of the *ooku* sent their *kimonos* to the temple to be used for these prayers because they believed that this would help them conceive the son of a shogun. Although the validity of the story remains questionable, the sponsorship by

the Tokugawa clan ended in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when a priest of the temple tried to enter the *ooku* by hiding in one of the boxes in which the *kimonos* were to be returned to the *ooku* (Kageyama 1974: 403-404; Miyagawa 2011: 20-22). Interestingly, during this period the Tokugawa shogunate had maintained close ties with the Pure Land School, while supporting Nichiren *kaji kito* (Hardacre 1982: 309) showing that many of Nichiren's successors did not continue with Nichiren's strong belief of refusing to perform *kito* for nonbelievers and the suggested lack of effectiveness of the prayer for those who did not believe in the *Lotus Sutra*.

Miyagawa collected data and looked at historical records of individuals who entered the *Nakayama* method of *aragyō* at the Onjuin Temple. Records show that on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1692, Onjuin Nikkyū started *aragyō* practice along with one other individual whose name remains unknown to this day. Since then, between 1692 and 1803, *aragyō* practice did not start on a set month, suggesting that *aragyō* could be started at any time that one wished as long as the individual could commit to 100 days of practice. Within these 150 years, approximately 55 or 56 people entered *aragyō* practice, meaning approximately one person entered every three years. Between the years 1804 and 1830, the number of individuals entering *aragyō* greatly increased and by 1837, the numbers had increased to approximately 15 individuals per year. Between 1854 and 1868, only educated individuals who had attended what today would be considered graduate level studies at the *danrin*, location of Nichiren Shū Buddhist study, were permitted to enter *aragyō* (Miyagawa 2011: 15-18). The only other major changes during this period included the government banning of *yorikito*, a type of exorcism, at Chisein in 1842 and at Onjuin in 1852. Only individuals who were gravely ill were allowed to have *yorikito* conducted on the condition that the individuals would continue to take medicine prescribed by the doctors (Miyagawa 2011: 18).



It is important to note that the *Mount. Minobu* method ceased existence and as a result, in the present day, the *Nakayama* method has remained the main and possibly the only form of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu. Due to problems with religious politics, currently the *Onjuin* method is still taught at the Onjuin Temple, although it is in teaching and practice similar to the *Nakayama* method taught at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple (Toyoshima 2004: 127). The Onjuin Temple remains very close in proximity to the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple and both temples continue to hold *aragyo* at approximately the same time frame (for 100 days from November to February). Within the Nichiren Shu denomination, undergoing *aragyo* at the Onjuin Temple does not qualify the same type of privilege provided to those priests that undergo *aragyo* at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple. However, discussion of this will not be provided within this paper.

### **The Changing Popularity of the Nichiren School's *Kaji Kito***

The *kaji kito* of the Nichiren School became more popular during the Edo period primarily due to the restriction of *shakubuku*, telling people that they have to believe a certain teaching in order to gain converts. Thus, the methods of propagation relied heavily on *kito*. The methods of *kaji kito* is very similar to *Shugendo*, a mountain ascetic practice based on primarily the Shingon and Tendai traditions. Stories of the effectiveness and benefits of the *kaji kito* conducted by the *gyoja* of the Nichiren School as well as *shugenja*, practitioners of *Shugendo* remained a popular topic among many during the Edo period. The common people knew that practitioners of both Nichiren *kito* and *Shugendo* underwent a long period of practice, which helped the practitioners to gain spiritual power. The practitioners would listen to the stories and concerns of those who were seeking advice and helped them through using the power provided by the spirits that could be transmitted by the practitioners.

Many provide evidence that *Shugendo* and Nichiren *kito* maintained similar popularities within the society and people also observed an alternation between popularities of the two traditions. Until approximately the 1600s, most of the *kito* methods were transmitted directly from master to disciple. Interestingly, pious individuals who did not hold a position as priests could also learn the practice. Senju Nichihei (1504-1601) completed 100 days of ascetic practice on Mount. Shichimen and gained popularity for his ability to cure all illnesses. In the Genroku era (1688-1704), many followed in Nichihei's lead and completed training on Mount. Shichimen, further increasing Nichiren *kito* practice. Some *shugenja* also practiced the Nichiren *kito* at Mount. Shichimen and even at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple, which interestingly had no relationships to mountain asceticism. Although some may suggest the relationship between the two for their mountain asceticism, this does not seem to be the case as the majority of *aragyo* practice in Nichiren Buddhism was confined to within the temple and did not involve undergoing training that could only be done on a mountain. The strongest influence of *Shugendo* on Nichiren *aragyo* was to limit the focus of several deities to Hariti, who maintained an influential role in *Shugendo* as well. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, *Shugendo* gained more popularity compared to Nichiren *kito* and has been the case since then. This becomes especially apparent when we see that the majority of the western sources on *kaji kito* remain primarily on *Shugendo* with a very rare mention of Nichiren *kito*.

### **Notable Individuals and Practices within the History of Nichiren School's *Kaji Kito***

Aside from the several individuals notable for developing *kaji kito* practice, many others are recognized for performing notable *kaji kito*. In the history of Nichiren Shu *kaji kito*, Shinkeiin Nichido remains one of the more prevalent for the effectiveness of his rain prayer

(*amagoe kito*) during the summer draft of 1747 (Toyoshima 2004: 133). Eishoin Nissen from Miyatani *danrin*, also succeeded in performing an *amagoe kito* in 1821. He professed that if his method were to fail, he would present his body to the heavens and is said to have placed a short knife on the *sanbou*, a tiny stand, to show the seriousness behind his intentions. In the end, the agreement worked in his favor.

Another notable individual is Mangyoin Nichijun, the head minister of the Shakuzenbo Temple during the mid-Edo period. On his way back to Mount. Minobu from Edo, current-day Tokyo, he stayed at the Honjyakuji Temple. That autumn evening he stepped outside, knowing that it was the night of the full moon, only to realize that the clouds were covering the sight of the moon. Nichijun's desire to see the full moon only gained him frustration and he decided to perform *kuji* using his *bokken*, while asking the moon deity to let him see the moon. Upon completing the *kuji*, the clouds are said to have moved apart and the full moon appeared. Due to this, he was given the name "*Kumokiri Mangyouin*", literally meaning "cloud-cutting Mangyouin" (Toyoshima 2004: 133) because the cutting action of the *kuji* separated the clouds away from the moon. The *bokken* used during that time is suggested to remain in the collection of treasures at the Kuonji Temple on Mount. Minobu.

There is a common belief among many believers of the Nichiren Shu sect that those having wishes should pay a visit and pray in front of the grave of Nichiyu, the third head priest of the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple. This idea stems from "Nabekamuri" (literal translation is "one who pours or has water poured on them") Nisshin from the *Nakayama* branch of *kaji kito* practice, known for having had hot water poured over his head during a debate. During his 100-day practice, Nisshin visited the grave every night and chanted Chapter 16 of the *Lotus Sutra* to pray for his own success in propagating Nichiren Shu Buddhism. On Nisshin's last night and

100<sup>th</sup> day of practice, Nichiyu appeared in his dream and vowed to protect Nisshin in his endeavors (Toyoshima 2004: 134; Miyazaki 1980: 162-187). Seeing that his thoughts had been heard, Nisshin put great effort into propagating Nichiren Shu Buddhism, only to result in oppression and torture by the shogun, Ashikaga Yoshinori. Interestingly, we see a strong resemblance between Nichiren and Nisshin both regarding their strong personalities and supposed fervent nature that probably came from the confidence and determination they had toward their faith. This probably allowed them to take extreme measures to spread the *Lotus Sutra*. Like Nichiren, Nisshin survived all persecutions and it would be Yoshinori who would be assassinated in the end (Frederic 2005: 56). This death of Yoshinori was not something wished upon by Nisshin himself, yet his death was suggested to signify that individuals who try to harm the “*Lotus Sutra*” will undergo misfortune.

“*Hokke gyoja*” is a specific term referring to the practitioner who has undergone *aragyo* and performs *kaji kito* (referring to *gyoja*) by maintaining faith in the *Lotus Sutra* (referring to *hokke*). Often times when trying to visually understand the faith of a *hokke gyoja* and power that comes from their *kaji kito*, many refer to a set of wolf fangs displayed within Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple’s collection of treasures. The story goes that Onjuin Nichikyu, while studying at Nakamura *danrin*, heard news that his master at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple was nearing his death. Nichikyu tried to hurry back to hear the last words of his master only to meet a wolf during his journey, who blocked the road and prevented him from seeing his master. Nichikyu told the wolf that if he would let Nichikyu pass the road, he would later return after his journey to the same location to offer his own body to the wolf. Upon hearing these words, the wolf disappeared. Nichikyu finally saw his master, performed a water prayer and *kaji kito*, hoping that his master’s illness would be cured. In the end, the illness was cured and Nichikyu started his

journey back to the Nakamura *danrin*. Knowing that he needed to fulfill the promise he made with the wolf, he visited the same location as promised. The wolf immediately appeared and bit his arm at which point Nichikyu turned his head the other way so as not to see the wolf gnawing at his arm. Interestingly he felt no pain, yet when he turned back to look at his arm, only the wolf's fangs remained piercing his skin with the wolf nowhere to be seen. The fangs themselves were used as a means of "*mayoke*" (a type of charm against evil spirits) as well as a "*tsukimono otoshi*" (an object used to brush off or prevent evil spirits from attaching to your body) (Toyoshima 2004: 135).

## Conclusions

Although there could be several reasons behind the persistence of the *Nakayama* denomination, it seems as if there were differences in ways of coping with the time periods and the changing views regarding *kaji kito* not only within Nichiren Shu, but among the general public. Because the *Nakayama* method seemed to focus on the common people, it led to the incorporation of different methods of *kaji kito* by trying to peak the interest of several individuals. Thus, there seemed to be a system of reciprocity—individuals would teach the *Nakayama* method to those who either developed or knew other methods of *kaji kito*. In doing so, the *Nakayama* method would spread among more individuals and could merge with several different methods. Although the *Mount. Minobu* method also attempted to incorporate different methods, it seems as if there was less merging compared to the *Nakayama* method. The *Nakayama* method also used the notion of reciprocity through their incorporation of different methods—they taught their method and in turn also learned other methods, thus leading to its expansion and development. Despite the noted disappearance of the *Mount. Minobu* method,

because of the continued merging between the two methods, we see that it in essence did not disappear. The notion that only the *Nakayama* method remained of prominence, probably stems from the fact that current Nichiren Shu *aragyo* practice continues only at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple. Overall, the merging of the methods has led to further specification of the several different methods to further define and develop the currently practiced *kaji kito* of Nichiren Shu.

## CHAPTER NINE:

### *Bokken*

Aside from the teachings and methods learned by the *gyoja*, in each Buddhist School that performs *kaji kito*, such as the Shingon and Tendai Schools, there are specific objects that define characteristic methods in the *kaji kito* performed. As noted before, for the Shingon School, it is the *dokko* (*Sanskrit. vajra*) and the bell (*Sanskrit. ghanta*). In the Nichiren Shu School, it is the combination between the *juzu*, rosary used in Buddhist religious practice as well as the *bokken*, a flattened piece of wood having the shape of the blade of the sword (see Appendix, Figure 3).

### *Kuji*

This type of *kaji kito* performed using the *bokken* is called “*bokken kaji*” and is used as a way of communicating with what are considered to be evil spirits that create undesirable occurrences, such as health problems. By performing *kuji*, the *gyoja* tries to satisfy the evil spirit so that they would “depart from” the individual being cursed or stop the undesirable events such as within a small town, from happening. Some examples of evil spirits include spirits of deceased people that continue to curse a living individual (“*shinryo*”), evil spirits that wish upon the death of certain priests (“*juso*”), spirits of foxes which in the Japanese tradition are often times believed to place a curse upon individuals (Etter 2004: 38) (“*yako*”), and a living person using a mediator to curse another living individual (“*ikiryo*”) (Toyoshima 2004: 132).

Although the date or time of its incorporation is uncertain, the *kuji* performed by the *kaji kito* of the Nichiren School was very likely adapted from *Shugendo*. In *Shugendo*, the practitioners chant “*rin pyo tou-sha kai chin retsu zai-zen*” and write nine horizontal and vertical

lines with their hands, each stroke separated by a syllable or character as separated within the above quote. In contrast, the *gyojas* of the Nichiren School chant, “*myo ho ren-ge kyo jou hon dai ichi*” and write the character, “*myo-ichi*” (妙一), one of the most important characters in the Nichiren School, in nine strokes. The reason behind the number nine comes from the concept of *yin* and *yang*. More specifically, the number signifies completion or manifestation, represented by *yang*, which has a masculine connotation and refers to reverence for the heavens (Iryon and Kim 2006: 6). By doing the *kuji*, the practitioners are asking for good spirits to come and bring peace, often known as “*harai kuji*” or *kuji* to brush off bad spirits.

In the early incorporation of *bokken*, many suggest that the actual *kuji* was not very complicated because the practitioners were expected to have learned how to use the *bokken* and do the *kuji* two or three days before starting the *aragyo* practice (Miyazaki 1980: 193-194).

### **Objects Used in *Bokken Kaji***

The initial practice of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism during the time of Nichiren and until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century did not involve the use of these particular objects. Despite the development of *mikkyo*-thought and *kaji kito* practice developed from influence by other schools of Buddhism, sources do not indicate the use of *kaji kito* objects such as *dokko* and the bell used in other schools. This is further specified by the historical documents stating the beginnings or the “discovery” of *bokken* by Senjuin Nichikan. During his practice on Mount. Shichimen, it is suggested that Senjuin Nichikan was praying to *Shichimen dai myojin* when a branch of a willow tree that he had placed in a vase in front of the altar flew to him as if someone had flung it forward (Toyoshima 2004: 132; Miyagawa 1980: 193). It came across him to perform *kaji kito* using the branch, which in itself is known as *yoji no ki*, called *yoji mamori* (protection) or *kaji* in



the *Shakuzenbo* method. At this point, the branch had been given the name *yoji* and not *bokken*. This method of using the branch for *kaji kito* practice is suggested to have continued with Nichikei as well. In the case of *bokken kaji* the reason for its use is that the spiritual power of the priest can be transmitted through the *bokken* and thus it remains an object to aid in connecting with spiritual powers of the deities, while also symbolizing a “sword” that protects the practitioner from evil spirits (Miyagawa 1980: 193).

*Shudai kengyo soden* states that in 1501, the shape of the *yoji* flattened and shaped to mirror the blade of a *katana*, a Japanese sword. In 1820, approximately a century after Nichikan first used the *yoji*, Nichiken of the *Mount. Minobu* denomination suggested that *yoji* is the equivalent of *bokken*, a term which generally refers to a wooden sword, often used in *kendo*, a traditional Japanese form of martial arts involving wooden sword-fighting. Despite stating this analogy, he continued to call the object a *yoji*. The *Mount. Minobu* method continued to use the term *yoji* and the term *bokken* only came into use once the object was adapted into the *Nakayama* method at the Onjuin Temple. Thus, the individuals who studied at *Mount. Minobu* adapted the notion of *bokken* into the *Nakayama* method.

Figure 4 (see Appendix) shows an image of the different types of *bokken* observed throughout history. The earlier *bokken*, rather than mimicking the shape of the blade of the sword, looked exactly like a sword. The notion of a sword stems from doing the *kuji*, which as noted before is termed “*kuji wo kiru*”, involving the action of “cutting” to do the strokes involved in writing sacred characters in the air. By doing this, it is meant to brush off or send away the evil spirits. Some serious practitioners even today are suggested to use a *shinken*, or real *katana* to do the *kuji*. Although sources have not stated this relationship, from observing the *bokken* shown in Figure 4 shaped like a sword, we see that the handle itself seems to have the shape of a

*vajra* due to the curved edges and the rounded circular shapes at the ends. More importantly, we can compare this shape to the sword held by *Fudo-Myoo* (*Sanskrit. Acala*), a deity revered primarily in the Shingon School. The hand of *Fudo-Myoo*'s sword is often referred to as a *sankoken* or a “*vajra* sword with three prongs”, something not observed in Figure 4. The blade of the sword held by *Fudo-Myoo* is also very long, which differs greatly from the short blade of the *bokken* shown. However, this possible relationship with *Fudo-Myoo* needs to be observed in further detail, although the use of the sword by *Fudo-Myoo* for slaying the evil and the use of *bokken* for using the action of “cutting” to write characters that send away evil spirits seems to be a very probable similarity.

The middle *bokken* shown in Figure 4 is much smaller, although it maintains the ridges that seem to represent the handle of the sword. Compared to the other *bokken* shown, it is small enough to be placed within one's hand. With the development of the use of the *bokken* throughout the history of *kaji kito* practice, it is suggested that ultimately seven types of *bokken*, differing in shape and size, were used for different types of *kito* performed. This included healing purposes of different parts of the body or for exorcism. Although the practitioners recognize the existence of these seven types, only one type is commonly used and for all types of *kaji kito* that continue to be performed today. The first *bokken* seen in Figure 2 has the shape most similar to the *bokken* commonly used today. The earliest form of the *bokken* varied from 11 to 22 cm in length. Earlier *bokkens* were made from typically wood of a peach tree (*Japanese. momo*) or *kachi/nurude*. The importance behind using wood from a peach tree comes from the common belief in China that it wards off evil spirits (Watts 2007: 288), also a common reason why branches from a peach tree are displayed during Girl's Day, an annual celebration in the Japanese tradition to wish for health and prosperity of daughters in the family. Currently, several

more types of trees are used, including the Jujube tree (*Jp. Natsume*), the Box tree (*Jp. tsuge*) and *hiiragi*, all chosen for the durability of the wood (Igarashi).

The biggest difference between the different types of *bokken* shown is the fact that the first *bokken* shown in Figures 3 and 4 contain writing. Although the writings on the *bokken* differ depending on the individual, the front face of the *bokken* typically contains the *odaimoku* along with the both *Jurya Setsunyo* (*Sanskrit. ten Raksasis*) as well as *Kishibojin/Kishimojin* (*Skt. Hariti*), important deities for Nichiren Shu *kaji kito* practice, that will be further discussed in a later section. The practitioner is also free to include names of other deities that he considers to be important (such as *Shoten zenjin*, protective deities of nature), surrounding the *odaimoku* in the form similar to that of the mandala. The back of the *bokken* can be left blank, yet many individuals write specific passages from the *Lotus Sutra* that they consider important, such as the *dharani*.

Up until approximately the Meiji Period, the *bokken* was used by itself for the purpose of performing *kaji kito* and aside from the noted changes in the sizes and the shape, it maintained a similar function and mode of usage. The current object used for *kaji kito* is a *bokken* in combination with a *juzu* placed on top, which was first introduced in the *Hokke Kenka Kunmo*, written sometime between 1884 and 1886 (Miyazaki 1980: 194). While the shape and overall number of beads in the *juzu* also differs in many traditions of Buddhism, the *juzu* used in the Nichiren School is probably one of the longest, consisting of 108 beads, all representing earthly desires. The *juzu* used for the *bokken* is folded over and tied together (see appendix, Figure 3) also consisting of an enlarged bead that strikes the *bokken* to make a loud clanking sound, which could signify the presence or aid from the Buddha or deities. Although the main reason that led to the use of both the *bokken* and *juzu* simultaneously remains unknown, by combining both, I

suggest that the *bokken* drives away evil spirits, while the *juzu* adds the element of calling the good spirits following the departure of evil spirits. Thus in doing the *kuji*, the *gyoja* includes an up-and-down movement (see Appendix, Figure 5) to incorporate the clanking sound which allows the practitioner to feel appreciation and gratefulness for receiving the aid from the deities. Interestingly, in the *Hokke Kenka Kunmo*, the *juzu* is placed on top of two *bokkens* of approximately 22cm in length (Miyagawa 1980: 194). This form of the *bokken* and *juzu* are to this day, preserved in a museum at Mount. Minobu.

In the present day, the *gyoja* is provided the flexibility in using a particular *bokken* such as choosing based on the sound that the different types of wood make when used with the *juzu*. Similarly, although the main kanji written when doing the *kuji* remains as writing “*myo-ichi*”, several more complicated forms of the *kuji* have also developed, which will not be discussed in this thesis.

## CHAPTER TEN:

### *Aragyo*

Nichiren shu *kaji kito* training, called *aragyo* is currently held only once a year during the winter for a period of 100 days. Completion of *aragyo* for a minimum of 100 days is necessary in order to learn the teachings of the *Kito Kyo*. However, information regarding the actual practice has been limited on a scholarly level as a result of the hidden nature of the practice. Not only are taking pictures in the locations of *aragyo* practice prohibited, those that are not undergoing the *kito* practice are not allowed to enter those same locations as well. The practice is also limited to only male Nichiren Shu priests due to several reasons, including the severity of the practice. This following section will focus on *aragyo* training at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple. The majority of this information was provided by my own father (Igarashi), who has undergone this practice a total of five separate times at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple. This is currently the number of times deemed necessary to fully learn all of the *kaji kito* teachings in the Nichiren School. As will be seen, different types of hidden teachings are taught depending on the number of times one enters *aragyo*, meaning that the more times that the practitioner enters *aragyo*, the more *kaji kito* methods they learn. I present here only information that would not be considered hidden teachings or information that cannot be relayed to the general public.

When a Nichiren Shu priest decides to enter *aragyo*, no matter how many times they have undergone the practice, several steps are taken to confirm the eligibility of the individual. First and foremost, the eligibility depends primarily on whether the individual has either 1) graduated from college in which case, the individual must be at least 23 years old or 2) is the head minister of a Nichiren Shu temple. Most often, it is better when the individual is a graduate of Rissho

University, the main university for Nichiren Shu priests, where the individual would have learned about the Nichiren Shu doctrine. However, if this is not the case, one would have to pass a test on the doctrines of Nichiren Shu. Upon passing this initial step, the individual is expected to do a physical to confirm that there are no severe health problems that would put the individual in great danger throughout the 100 days of practice. For an individual deciding to enter *aragyo* for the first time, there is also a required “chanting” test that one must pass. While usually the individual does not have to read the whole *Lotus Sutra* during their test, the general understanding is that the individual must be able to chant the whole *Lotus Sutra* at a rapid pace or they would not be able to keep up with the other practitioners in *aragyo*. Following a background check, the committee in charge of determining the eligibility of the priest will notify him whether or not he has been accepted.

All accepted practitioners come to the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple on the morning of November 1<sup>st</sup>, bringing only the most basic and necessary items (such as a toothbrush) along with all 28 chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*, which the ministers will chant everyday for the next 100 days. The priests arrive with their head completely shaved and wearing the clothes typically worn by Buddhist priests during religious services (*hakui*, *kesa* and *koromo*), except all in the color white. It is important to note that although the color white, like in many cultures, is meant to represent purity, this is the same garb that the priests are clothed in when they pass away. The significance behind this comes from the notion that the priests start the practice with the mindset that they are ready to die any moment during these 100 days of training. For them, starting *aragyo* is the same as entering another world, isolated from the outside world, where they focus on their religious endeavors and learning methods of *kaji kito*. This notion of isolation is further emphasized because the priests are secluded within gated confines and are unable to leave for the

whole 100 days. Thus when the ministers begin their practice, they enter through a gate called the “*zuimon*” that is opened only twice per year—once when the ministers start their practice and once after the completion of the 100 days of practice. Individuals who become ill or die during their training are also unable to leave. Although this has not happened in recent years, the common knowledge is that when a practitioner passes away, he is cremated and placed on the altar in the room designated as the location of chanting done for all practitioners. After the 100 days are over, the deceased practitioner’s roommate brings the ashes with him as he steps outside the *zuimon*, which is returned to the family who conducts a funeral service for the individual. As shown, the notion of staying within the gated confines is taken very seriously—pleas of individuals wishing to leave will be denied.

The practitioners are also forbidden to cut their hair during *aragyō*, thus restricting them from bringing any type of scissors or razors. This notion of growing out one’s hair could symbolize the increasing spiritual power gained throughout the training process and can represent one’s spiritual development. To an outsider, often times the physical appearance of the practitioner becomes the greatest indication or symbol of the asceticism undergone by the practitioner during this time period. However, after the practitioner finishes *aragyō*, the priest is allowed to cut their hair and shave their beard off and return to a normal life.

Moments before entering into the *zuimon*, the priests line up (see Appendix, Figure 6) according to the number of times each individual has undergone the practice—the more times an individual has undergone the practice, the closer they will be to the front of the line. Prior to entering through the *zuimon*, the priests march and visit significant places near the temple, such as the gravesite of Nichijō, followed by a final prayer at the main temple attended by many, including the family members and lay members of Nichiren Shu temples where the priests

entering the *aragyō* practice normally reside. After the priests enter through the *zuimon* one by one at around 1:00 p.m., the gate remains closed for the next 100 days and the priests immediately go to the main altar room where they start their chanting of the *Lotus Sutra*. From this day on, the practitioners live the life of an ascetic, sleeping approximately three to four hours per day with only two meals of rice porridge and *miso* soup, finished in a matter of minutes. These common daily actions consist of only a small portion of their daily life. Thus, during this time, their daily schedule is focused on praying and purifying oneself to become “worthy” enough to save others by performing *kaji kito*.

The first 35 days of practice, called *jigyō*, focuses on the practitioners removing all of their own sins (*zaisho shometsu*) by reading a lot of prayers. There are specific sets of sutras for all seven days of the week and thus depending on the day of the week, the practitioner focuses on different types of prayer. Because the practitioner is primarily focused on purifying their own spirit, they are not allowed to communicate with anyone outside of the gated confines. However, after this period of *jigyō*, the remaining 65 days is called *ketagyō*, meaning that the practitioners still continue to pray for the purpose of *zaisho shometsu*, but also for the well-being of others, such as lay members of their temple. During this time, the practitioners can meet with visitors for a short period of time (approximately 5-10 minutes) within a designated room created for this purpose. However, the visitors are strictly forbidden to go beyond the confines of the room to visit the priest’s room or observe the practice. This includes ministers who are not training that year in *aragyō* as well.

Chanting is one of the most important practices within *aragyō* where the common phrase used is “*doku wo haku*”, which has two meanings. “Chanting” can be translated to Japanese as “*dokkyō*” and thus it is common to use the phrase as a way to emphasize the importance of



chanting. However, “*doku*” literally translates to “poison”, while “*haku*” means “to vomit” in Japanese. The *doku* is meant to symbolize one’s sins and so within the context of *aragyō*, it is commonly understood that by chanting continuously, one will be able to expel of their sins and thus *zaishō shometsu*. From 3:00 a.m., which is the time when the practitioners wake up, until 11:00 p.m., when the practitioners go to sleep, the sound of chanting and the hitting of the *mokushō*, a wooden object often used in combination with a wooden stick consisting of a bulging wooden end, cannot stop. Therefore, by chanting the *Lotus Sutra* repeatedly, one is making “benefits”, which the practitioner takes into his own body and these benefits will be used to help others when it comes time for them to do *kaji kito*. Due to this constant chanting, many of the ministers lose their voice for a period of time.

This notion of purifying oneself is further elaborated with another important practice, known as *suigyō* (“water prayer”), done seven times per day by every practitioner. This prayer involves pouring cold water over themselves, wearing only what looks like an undergarment made from a length of cloth, while chanting a prayer, called the *suigyō kanmon*. Within the prayer, one calls out to the famous deceased priests who played significant roles in the development of *kaji kito*, such as Nichijū, along with showing respect for Nichiren as well. The main objective of the prayer is to wish for world peace and prosperity, while also wishing for everyone’s happiness.

The first *suigyō* practice starts at 3:00 a.m. One of the duties of the *shogyō* (first-time practitioners) is to wake up earlier than the senior practitioners (around 2:30 a.m.) and line up the *oke*, the bucket that the practitioners use to pour cold water over themselves. The order of doing *suigyō* also starts from the *denshi* (who does the *suigyō* two times per day), followed by the *gogyō* (fifth-time practitioners), *yongyō* (fourth-time practitioners), *sangyō* (third-time

practitioners), *saigyō* (second-time practitioners) and finally the *shōgyō*. Because there is enough room for only 12 practitioners to do *suigyō* at a time, the *shōgyō* use the time to learn how to chant the *suigyō kanmon* by listening to and repeating the prayer along with the senior practitioners. Thus, the *suigyō kanmon* is one example of the many *kuden* that are verbally transmitted from the senior practitioners. The process is repeated again at 6:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Thus the last *suigyō* ends at around 11:30 p.m. and the process repeats itself again at 3:00 a.m. the next morning.

Aside from the praying that is done communally by all practitioners, led by the *denshi*, each individual, depending on the number of times that they entered the practice, have different “topics” that become the main teaching that they learn during their 100 days of practice. The *shōgyō* (first-time practitioners) primarily learn the basics of doing *bokken kaji*, such as how to do the *kuji*, as well as helping out with chores within the temple, including cleaning the halls and preparing the daily meals. The *denshi* usually teaches the *shōgyō* the methods of how to properly use the *bokken*. The *shōgyō* must learn to keep their arm straight because it is said that power transmits directly through the arm and so bending one’s arm would hinder this appropriate transmission. Often the training occurs approximately twice per day, once sometime in the morning and also at night, for about an hour each. The majority of their training comes from either observing or learning directly from the senior practitioners who help the *shōgyō* to become better adjusted to the *aragyō* environment. Similarly, the senior practitioners sit towards the back of the prayer hall during communal praying led by the *denshi* as a way to watch over and take care of the new and inexperienced practitioners who sit closer to the front.

Aside from this, the *shōgyō* learn *kenmyōshō*, which includes the basics of *kaji kito* such as learning methods of *kaji kito* that could be used for the sick, among many others. More

importantly, the practitioner also hand transcribes the *Kito Kyo*, which as noted before, is wrapped with cloth and used for *kito* practice. Although the practice is required for the *shogyo* this is not required for the senior practitioners so this practice of transcribing the *Kito Kyo* remains a common practice among all practitioners, regardless of seniority. The *Kito Kyo* remains one of the most important texts to be used within *aragyō*. After finishing the first 100 days of training, the practitioner receives a certificate, designating them as a *shuhoshi*, or an individual that can perform *kaji kito* practice. Although the practitioner learns the basics of *kaji kito* during their first 100 days of training, the purpose of entering *kaji kito* beyond these first 100 days includes increasing their understanding of *kaji kito* and learning more methods and secrets (*hiden*) of *kaji kito* that one learns through verbal transmission. This is not to say that all practitioners undergo all 500 days of practice, primarily due to the severe psychological and physical toll resulting from the practice. It is up to the individual to determine how many times they wish to enter *aragyō*.

The *saigyō* (second-time practitioners) learn *heisoku shomo*, which include how to make different types of *heisoku*, which as stated before, provides a place of dwelling for the deities, out of white paper. Often times one learns this using the *densho* because each deity dwells in a differently shaped *heisoku*. Miyazaki Eishu has written about the specifics of how to make these different *heisoku*, which technically should not be taught to individuals that have not undergone *aragyō*. However, it is important to note that *saigyōs* learn more than just how to make the *heisoku*, which can only be taught through verbal transmission.

The *sangyō* (third-time practitioners) specifically learn about how to worship Mahakala (*Japanese. Daikokuten*), a deity of good fortune. Although the discussion of Mahakala will be provided later in this paper, the specifics of what the practitioners learn about Mahakala in

*aragyō* including what many suggest as the hidden secrets of Mahakala, remain a hidden teaching. However, what is certain is that after completing this practice, the practitioners can install a Mahakala idol “properly” within one’s temple.

The *yongyō* (fourth-time practitioners) learn how to properly worship *Suijin*, the water deity, which like the *heisoku* is of Shinto origin. This provides an example of syncretism between Nichiren Shū Buddhism and Shinto, which was prevalent even during Nichiren’s time. Although at this point I am unable to clearly state whether the understanding of how to worship *Suijin* started during Nichiren’s time, it is highly likely that Nichiren recognized the significance of this deity given that he worshipped deities of Shinto origin—he considered them to be the protectors of Japan and subsequently the *Lotus Sutra* as in the case of Amaterasu and Hachiman. However, this could also influence the significance of *suigyō* as well and the notion of purifying oneself.

The *gogyō* learn *honzon sojō*, the information behind properly creating a *mandala*, one of the significant teachings that stem from Nichiren’s time. The continuation of this practice suggests that the *mandala* remains connected to the notion of *kaji kito* within Nichiren Shū Buddhism. Not much more can be written regarding the *mandala* aside from the fact that the practitioners also learn how to properly display the mandala.

When the practitioners exit the *zuimon* after 100 days of practice, the austerity of the training undergone by the practitioners remains ever-present. The practitioners emerge with their hair grown out with beards, wearing white garb and a *senkyō* hanging around their necks (see Appendix, Figure 7). After all practitioners finish their last communal prayer and *bokken kaji* in the main hall in the presence of all attendees including their family and lay members from their temples, their training ends. Within this ascetic environment, the practitioners learn the essence

of *aragyō*, condensed into two phrases that are written on a scroll and hung up next to the altar in the prayer room for all 100 days. The two phrases can also be seen on the two flags shown in the periphery of the group picture taken at the end of the *aragyō* training (see appendix, Figure 8). The first is “*kansui byakujiku bonkotsu masani karenantosu*”, stating that these 100 days of practice, eating just rice porridge and pouring cold water over oneself leads to the death of a *bonjin* (normal person living in this world), equated to the removal of the sins of a human being. The second important phrase is “*rizanjige shotai onozukara shozu*”, which states that if one continuously chants the sutra and devotes themselves to their training, they will become closer in spirit to the Buddha. Therefore both phrases combined suggest both death followed by the rebirth of the new purified spirit—after such harsh ascetic training, one’s body becomes white and even almost as translucent as a candle, meaning that your spirit will also be purified in the process. This purification provides the *gyoso* the qualification to connect to the deities and relay that power to those seeking the aid of these spirits through *kaji kito*.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: Explanation of Important Deities

Nichiren's reverence of both Amaterasu and Hachiman and their incorporation into the mandala are important in showing how Nichiren viewed them as defenders of the *Lotus Sutra* and of Japan. Interestingly, significant deities in Nichiren Buddhist *kaji kito*, are also seen in the mandala, yet the majority if not all of them have an Indian origin. Nichiren himself mentioned and worshipped the majority of these deities as indicated by their inclusion into his mandalas, yet his view on their relationship to *mikkyo* or *kaji kito* practice remains obscure. Therefore, incorporating them into the importance of *kaji kito* probably came several years following his death.

### **Hariti (Japanese. *Kishimojin/Kishibojin*)**

The name *Hariti* itself means “green”, a color associated in the east with growth. The Japanese term for her name “*Kishimojin*” provides a different connotation. “*Kishimo*” means “Mother of Ghost Children” because legend has it that she was impregnated by her husband, *Pancika*, considered to be a ghost, and in total, gave birth to 500 children (Chaudhuri 2003: 84). Yet, the Chinese characters of her name include the terms “mother” and “*oni* (demon)”. Her story goes that *Hariti* kidnapped and ate children. Many concerned parents visited the *Sakyamuni* Buddha and asked for his help in preventing her from taking any more and causing more pain. Thus, the Buddha decided that he would hide one of *Hariti*'s 500 children named *Priyankara*. The Buddha placed his alms-bowl over *Priyankara* and he became invisible to everyone else, even though he himself could see everyone else. *Hariti* was extremely upset and searched all

over the world in tears for seven days, but was unable to find the child. She visited Vaisravana (*Japanese. Bishamonten*) to tell him that she was distraught and could not find her child.

Vaisravana suggested that she visit the Buddha. She asked the Buddha to help her find the child, not knowing that he had hidden Priyankara. The Buddha asked her that if she felt such sadness and pain from losing only one out of her 500 children, how she thought the parents of the children she kidnapped felt. She promised the Buddha that she would adopt the Buddha's teachings and would never again kidnap anymore children and would instead protect children from evil. Therefore, Hariti has been worshipped by many in relation to childbirth and concerning the well-being of children (Illes 2009: 464)

Both Hariti and Pancika were considered local deities of the Gandhara region in India as evidenced by the several idols found within the region. Many worshipped her in the hopes of being blessed with a child followed by safe delivery of the child. Although Hariti was not included within the divine status of Hindu gods and goddesses, she was worshipped in several monasteries as a cloth idol in Turfan, a northern city on the Silk Road, and thus showing the ways in which Hariti was initially introduced to China. In *Keiso Saijiki*, written during the Liang Dynasty (502-587), we see that Hariti was worshipped on the "eighth day of the fourth month" in the Choshaji Temple (Chaudhuri 2003: 79).

Hariti was first referenced in Japanese literature in the *Konko myo kyo* sutra, which mentions her first visit to the Four Heavenly Kings along with Pancika and her 500 children. More importantly, Saicho suggested that Hariti was the savior of Japan, a notion that Nichiren himself probably also accepted. By 1154, records indicate the emergence of mandalas containing Hariti's name as well as information regarding specific methods of worshipping Hariti. Explanations of physical characteristics and hand gestures were also provided within these texts

to create accurate statues of Hariti. One example in particular includes the positioning of the left hand, which symbolizes the granting of wishes—the palm faces up while the fingers point down (Chaudhuri 2003: 86).

Both the Shingon and Tendai schools worshipped Hariti throughout the Kamakura Period as suggested in the provided explanations of her rituals in *Asabasho* and *Kakuzensho*. Although Hariti continued to be worshipped primarily in the hopes of safe delivery, other reasons were also incorporated, including the welfare of one's children and recovery from illnesses. A record from 1247 states that statues of Hariti and fifteen of her children were installed in the location of successful child delivery to show appreciation for Hariti.

Some suggest that Nichiren himself carved Hariti idols, one of which is located at the Kakuzoji Temple in present-day Tokyo. Legend has it that Nichiren carved a Hariti idol on the “eighth day of the eighth month” of 1253 that would protect him on his journey to promoting the *Lotus Sutra*. In 1271, right before Nichiren was to be executed, an old woman presented him with sesame cakes and in return, Nichiren gave her the Hariti idol. The idol was kept as a family treasure for generations to come, until in 1733 when the Hariti idol was given to the monk Nichiyo, who installed it in the Kakuzoji Temple (Chaudhuri 2003: 83).

Many more sources indicate the popular worship of Hariti during the Edo Period (Nishiyama 2007: 256), primarily in Edo at a Hariti sanctuary consisting of a wooden idol brought by a monk by the name of Nisshobo in 1578. The idol gained popularity and became known as the deity that successfully fulfilled wishes of all individuals, making the sanctuary one of the major sightseeing locations within Edo. The sanctuary consists of a temple of the Nichiren sect that continues to worship and hold rituals relating to Hariti to this day.



When many try to characterize Nichiren Shu *kaji kito*, Hariti is quickly considered as the most significant deity within the practice. However, this is not the case. Since Nichiren's time, many of his disciples maintained their faith in the ten raksasis, yet this changed to faith in the "Go banjin", who were the five deities that appear in Chapter 26 (Dharani) of the *Lotus Sutra* that each offer specific spells that compose parts of the whole *dharani* (Miyazaki 1969: 112-141). These five deities include the Medicine-King Bodhisattva (*Japanese. Yakou Bosatsu*), the Brave-in-Giving Bodhisattva (*Japanese. Yuuze Bosatsu*), Vaisravana (*Japanese. Bishamonten*), Dhrtarastra (*Japanese. Jikokuten*) and the ten raksasis. Depending on the translation of the text, often times Hariti is combined with the ten raksasis, yet more interestingly, Chapter 26 is the only chapter mentioning both Hariti and the ten raksasis. However, Hariti, who does not directly provide a spell, becomes the most important deity within the *kaji kito* tradition of Nichiren Buddhism. This is because when *kaji kito* of Nichiren Buddhism became famous during the Edo period, reading the names of all of the five deities and all of the individual names of the ten raksasis became a difficult task and instead, people decided to shorten this to worshipping just Hariti (Miyagawa 2011: 16). The specific reasons for choosing Hariti remain unclear although my own possible interpretation is related to Nichiren's own devotion towards his own mother. This suggestion will be further elaborated in the next subsection.

Nichiren himself only mentioned Hariti in his writings for a total of six times (Chanduri 2003: 81) and seems to maintain a stronger faith in the ten raksasis. Nichiren's reason for revering the ten raksasis is because out of the five deities that appear in the Dharani Chapter, they are the only deities that vow to specifically protect those that uphold the name of the *Lotus Sutra*. Thus, they state to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, we will use our own bodies to shield and guard those who accept, uphold, read, recite, and practice this sutra. We will see that

they gain peace and tranquility, freeing them from decline and harm and nulling the effect of all poison herbs” (Watson 1993: 310). Therefore, Nichiren believed that those that maintain faith in the *Lotus Sutra* will be protected by the ten raksasis as well as the other deities mentioned in the Dharani chapter.

Miyazaki states that faith in the ten raksasis was not as important within the society as opposed to the worship of Hariti because the significance of the ten raksasis was based primarily on faith with respect to the *Lotus Sutra* (1969: 3-27). Yet, sanctuaries of the Shingon sect, including the Juryasetsunoyodo and Jurasetsunyo no Miya, both located in present-day Tokyo are dedicated solely to the ten raksasis (Chaudhuri 2003: 84). Further research should be done in order to understand the importance of the ten raksasis within the Shingon tradition. As previously noted, *Asabasho* (consisting of Tendai *mikkyo* teachings and rituals) as well as *Kakuzensho* (consisting of Shingon *mikkyo* teachings and rituals) were published during Nichiren’s time. *Asabasho* mentions the ten raksasis and therefore we see the relationship between faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and the ten raksasis that are in parallel with Nichiren’s view on the importance of the ten raksasis. Although *Kakuzensho* includes the rituals of the *Lotus Sutra* as mentioned in the second section of this paper, the ten raksasis are missing.

In *Nichinyo honpon kuyo*, we see the first mention that Hariti is the mother of the ten *raksasis*, a relationship that was not mentioned in the original *Lotus Sutra*. This was probably adapted because Hariti’s name written in Chinese characters suggests that she is the mother of demons (Miyazaki 1969: 112-141). Deciding on whether the ten *raksasis* or Hariti should be of a higher status was debated both before and during Nichiren’s time, even though Hariti’s role as the mother to the ten *raksasis* had already been established.

The Hariti idols within Japan show two separate depictions of Hariti (see Appendix, Figure 9). *Kankimoho* states that Hariti is in the form of a heavy maiden of white complexion covered in jewelry, holding a pomegranate in her right hand with Priyankara in the other (Chanduri 2003: 85). The other form is the most common depiction of Hariti, which is a picture of her having the face of an “*oni*” (demon). This is probably because during the Tokugawa Period, they focused more on the fact that her name had the Chinese character of “*oni*” (Miyazaki 1969: 28-112). Especially in *kaji kito* practice where one of the main objectives is to drive away evil spirits, having a gentle-faced Hariti would not serve the purpose of scaring the evil spirits away. This can be equated to the role of Acala within the Shingon tradition, who maintains an angry face and composure. However a direct correlation between the two has not been noted in any sources and requires further analysis. However, some records mention that some Hariti statues in the temples of the Nichiren Sect stood with a pomegranate in her hand and embracing a child in the other (Amano 1977: 158). Hariti idols with the face of the maiden were often worshipped for safe delivery and for the well being of the child, while the demon-faced Hariti became associated with driving away evil spirits. Almost all of the Hariti idols in the Nichiren School now have the face of the demon and are worshipped for all of the reasons that were formerly divided depending on the face of Hariti.

### **Ten Raksasis (*Japanese. Juryasetsunyo*)**

The ten raksasis are mentioned as the daughters of Hariti within the *Dharani* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Works such as *Asabasho* that mention Hariti do not include the ten raksasis, so it is within the context of the *Lotus Sutra* and as defenders of those that believe in the *Lotus Sutra* that Nichiren probably saw their importance.

Although Nichiren himself does not mention Hariti as much in comparison to the ten raksasis, we see that in the mandala, Hariti was given a higher position on the mandala (on the right side of the *odaimoku*) in comparison to the ten raksasis, which were written on the left hand side of the *odaimoku*. Although Nichiren gave priority to Hariti (Chanduri 2003: 81), there is no clear evidence as to the reason behind this. Possibilities could include Nichiren's own faith in the ten raksasis and the mentioned popularity of Hariti in contrast to the ten *raksasis* during the time period.

However, further analysis has allowed me to propose that this could correlate to Nichiren's own view of filial piety. As noted, throughout his life, Nichiren cared for his parents even in exile. More importantly, one of his most famous *kaji kitos* that he performed included that of reviving his mother. In many of his writings, Nichiren notes how without parents, there would no child and therefore, it is the duty of the children to care for their parents (Yampolsky 1990: 63). In his *Myoichi Amagozen Gohenji*, Nichiren specifically refers to the important connection established between mother and child—the child should never abandon their mother and the mother will never abandon the child. He also refers to the handships that mothers face both prior to and after the birth of the child in his *Juuoh Sandan Sho*, suggesting that children are forever in debt to their mother. Nichiren also held the view that the mother more than the father played a more significant role in the household.

Nichiren probably placed Hariti above the ten raksasis for this same reason—without Hariti having raised and given birth to these ten raksasis, the last section of the Dharani chapter would not have been complete nor would there be protectors of individuals who believe in the *Lotus Sutra*. More interestingly, careful reading of the Dharani Chapter would show that the Brave-in-Giving Bodhisattva also told the Buddha that he would “guard those who read, recite,

accept, and uphold the *Lotus Sutra*” (Watson 1993: 308-311). As noted, some believe that Nichiren chose the ten raksasis because they vowed to protect the followers of the *Lotus Sutra*. However, it seems as if Nichiren’s reason behind choosing the ten raksasis goes beyond solely the notion of protecting the believers of the *Lotus Sutra*. Consequently and as also previously noted, some believe that Nichiren chose Hariti because chanting all of the names five deities including the ten raksasis would be a long task. However, if simplicity were the only reason why Nichiren chose Hariti, then he would probably have chosen the Brave-in-Giving Bodhisattva.

Similarly, as suggested before, Nichiren’s own devotion toward his parents, rather his mother in particular, could also have influenced Nichiren’s own belief that women could also attain Enlightenment. The ten rakasis are also the only females mentioned within the Dharani Chapter, however, further analysis of this is required. One suggestion I propose is that daughters become mothers who give birth to daughters that also in turn become mothers. Therefore, it is possible that in choosing Hariti’s daughter’s he was also referring to the neverending cycle of motherhood. Because it is motherly instinct to putting one’s life in risk to protect the child, there is also the notion of “motherly” protection of the followers of the *Lotus Sutra* that only the female deities could provide. In this sense, the ten raksasis who as “mothers” protect their “children”, who are the followers of the *Lotus Sutra*.

### **Mahakala (Japanese. *Daikokuten*)**

A lesser-known, but important deity within *kaji kito* is that of Mahakala, primarily understood within Japanese Buddhism as the deity that brings good luck and happiness. Even within the Japanese tradition, the deity is included as one of the *Shichifukujin* or “Seven Deities

of Fortune”. As already mentioned, worship of Mahakala is one of the main topics studied in *aragyo*.

Saicho worshipped Mahakala and thus, we see the mentioning of the deity’s name within *Asabasho* (Miyazaki 1968: 75). Mahakala was first introduced into Buddhism in the early history of esoteric Buddhism when several Hindu gods were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon (Masaki 2004: 67). Thus, many suggest that Mahakala is referenced as the Buddhist form of either Shiva, the destroyer of the evil, or his attendant, Nandi. Although it is unclear specifically when Mahakala first came to Japan, Saicho is the first individual in Japan to be associated with Mahakala. Thus, it is possible that Saicho himself introduced Mahakala to Japan following his return to Japan from China. Legend has it that Saicho first saw Mahakala at Sakamoto, a town located at the bottom of Mount. Hiei and asked the deity to identify himself. Mahakala introduced himself and stated that he would bring happiness not only to the poor villagers within Sakamoto, but also any one else seeking it. The story of Saicho’s encounter with Mahakala first appears in *Sanrin daimyoji enri*, meaning that it is not noted in *Asabasho* or any of Saicho’s works. It is also unknown whether Nichiren himself knew of the story. In *Dengo Daishiden*, the biography of Saicho written by Kakujin, it states that upon his return to Japan, Saicho prayed in hopes of finding a deity or protector for the Tendai sect. One day, Mahakala finally presented himself in front of Saicho had been praying. Mahakala was holding a cane made from a Cryptomeria Tree and promised Saicho that he would forever continue to protect Saicho along with all three thousand monk that were living on Mount. Hiei. The story goes that since that day, a Mahakala idol was established on Mount. Hiei and Mahakala became the protector of the Tendai tradition (Miyazaki 1969: 155-176).

Although Nichiren's own reasons for incorporating Mahakala is still unknown, most likely, it is a result of the emphasis on Mahakala that he saw during his time on Mount. Hiei, prior to becoming the founder of the Nichiren School. Provided this assumption, it is still uncertain specifically what characteristics of Mahakala were interesting to him, given that Mahakala is not mentioned within the *Lotus Sutra* itself. A possibility is that Nichiren knew the role of Mahakala in providing happiness to all people, which as stated throughout the paper, is one of his main objectives for spreading the *Lotus Sutra* and possibly incorporating *mikkyo* into his teachings.

Nichiren himself left seven writings relating to the importance of Mahakala, the most prominent work being the *Daikokutenjin kuyou sojosi*, which labels Mahakala as the eternal Sakyamuni Buddha. Thus those that believe him will be at peace in the next world and continue to gain happiness in the next life as well, termed "*genze annon gosho zensho*" (Miyazaki 1969: 155-176). Similarly, some suggest that Nichiren wrote how one hundred black beans should be offered to Mahakala (Chaudhuri 1969: 72) on a designated day, known as *Kinoene*. However, Miyazaki notes that there is debate surrounding whether Nichiren really did include Mahakala in his writings, due to the questions that remain about the authorship of these particular works (1969: 155-176). Similarly, provided that Nichiren really did consider Mahakala to be an important deity, it is unusual that Nichiren did not include Mahakala in his mandala. It was not until the mid-Muromachi Period (1337-1573) when Mahakala appears on a mandala of the Nichiren sect. The oldest preserved mandala containing Mahakala was written by Nitten, the 18<sup>th</sup> successor of the Myokakuji Temple in 1578, who refers to Mahakala as "*Daikokutenjin*" (Miyazaki 1969: 155-176).

Early Mahakala idols were suggested to have been modeled by the pictures of Mahakala seen in the Womb Mandala, due to the initial interpretation of Mahakala as the deity of war. In the mandala, Mahakala has three faces, all having a bluish-black complexion, carrying a sword with one hand and grabbing the hair of a naked man with the other (see Appendix, Figure 10). Each face had three eyes along with two fangs and fiery hair (Chanduri 2003: 68). However, almost all of the Mahakala idols worshipped in the Nichiren School show a smiling or laughing Mahakala with the round red cap, carrying a hammer in his right hand and a bag over his shoulder, containing rice (see Appendix, Figure 10). This smiling Mahakala is also the common interpretation of the deity among the Japanese today, depicted to bring peace and happiness. Although it is also unknown when this version of Mahakala was initially incorporated into the Nichiren tradition (Terajima 1989: 68-70), we can only be certain that Mahakala was incorporated into the teachings of the Tendai School, which probably influenced the worshipping of Mahakala in the Nichiren School.

It is also unknown why Mahakala was incorporated into the *aragyo* practice of Nichiren Shu. One possible theory I suggest is that both Hariti and Mahakala encompass each other in the same way that I previously suggested the *bokken* and the *juzu* are related to each other. As mentioned before, the suggested notion is that the *bokken* sends off evil spirits, while the *juzu* brings in the good spirits. This is based off of the assumption that Hariti symbolizes the warding off of the evil spirits and Mahakala symbolizes the calling in of happiness and therefore good spirits. Yet, this assumption can be further justified because only the demon-faced Hariti idols and smiling Mahakala idols are observed within the Nichiren Shu tradition—the counterparts are absent. Also, Nichiren's incorporation of Mahakala as the deity of good fortune rather than the god of war can show that Nichiren already respected Hachiman as the God of War and therefore



there was no need for another deity of the same purpose. However the year when we first see evidence of Mahakala worship in the Nichiren School (mid-Muromachi Period) precedes the year when both the *juzu* and *bokken* were first used together (Meiji Period). Therefore, we can also suggest that the incorporation of Mahakala in the Nichiren School could have promoted the use of *juzu* in combination with the *bokken*, although sources are yet to be found to support such analysis.

**PART FOUR:**

**CONCLUSIONS AND THE FUTURE OF *KAJI KITO*  
IN NICHIREN SHU BUDDHISM**

Despite the several questions that remain regarding *kaji kito* in any given context, this attempt to analyze the incorporation and development of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism has shown the persisting influence of prayer in any given society. At the same time, understanding prayer in the context of *kaji kito* also remains a topic hard to explain using solely verbalized words and actions. The many stories of *kaji kito* have been met by many with skepticism due to the lack of understanding behind this form of prayer, placing it often times in the same category as magic. Yet as this paper has shown, the objective behind prayer is not what happens during the prayer, but the after effects or the results obtained as a result of the prayer. Like in any given situation, often times when the desired result is obtained, many forget about the mysticism and questions involved in obtaining that result and thus begin to rely on the practice with a blind eye.

From a different perspective, we see that those that see *kaji kito* with skepticism try to understand the specifics and the ways that the practice can be critiqued by fully trying to observe and pinpoint the ambiguities of the practice. However, this seems to ruin the whole notion of prayer. This is because when we pray, we believe in “something”, whether it is a higher deity or a spirit that usually we ourselves cannot see. As in the case of several schools of Buddhism and several other religious traditions, we worship carvings of specific deities that we entrust our faith in. We can never know if someone is there listening to our prayers, but we still continue to believe. Therefore, this notion of praying is not something forced upon us, yet something that we have instinctively done since the beginning of time, no matter what the purpose. However, this is not to say that those that accept prayers without even attempting to take into the account the mysticism involved are correct because the added level of “curiosity” is what makes *kaji kito* and prayer in general so unique. If we delve deeper, the question remains regarding to what extent we

as humans truly believe in prayer, especially in times when the objective requires time or is not so obvious, such as wanting happiness.

Within the modern day world, people continue to maintain the perspective that *kaji kito* is similar to magic and superstitious happenings. However, what makes *kaji kito* so unique is the added component of prayer that is rarely present in magic or superstition. We often hear stories of “mind controllers” that try to use the power of specifically prayer as a means of trickery and selfish gain. Those who do not understand prayer are unable to distinguish between different types of prayers, which has led to many of the negative views on *kaji kito*. However, we must understand that the times that we are more vulnerable or emotionally unstable, the more likely we are to think without reason. These are the same times that we are apt to using prayer for selfish desires and stray from the true meaning of prayer discussed throughout the thesis.

By analyzing the objectives of several types of *kaji kito* that are performed, one of the major confusions that possibly many encounter is validating the reasons for doing a specific *kaji kito* practice from solely a Buddhist perspective. In other words, one of the main goals of Buddhism includes eliminating desires. Yet, is it not true that most of the *kaji kito* performed focuses primarily on human desires, such as the desire to cure an illness? Therefore, is it correct to have Buddhist priests performing such prayers for the person to obtain a specific desire? People are all prone to having desires and thus in certain situations, the Buddhist understanding of desire is further understood. Therefore, not all desires can be considered, at least from the perspective of *kaji kito*, to be selfish and preventing the elimination of suffering. For example, an individual wishing for the well being of their child or a child wishing for the well being of their parents should not be labeled as one who causes suffering. This can be further elaborated on by focusing particularly on Nichiren Shu *kaji kito*.

When people hear about Nichiren and his actions, many are quick to associate him with the fact that his goal in life was to convert as many people as he could to the *Lotus Sutra*. However, because of his strong personality and his continued emphasis on the *Lotus Sutra*, many forget about his main objective behind wanting to spread the *Lotus Sutra*, which was to bring peace and happiness to everyone. When Nichiren first incorporated *mikkyo* into his teachings, it seems as if Nichiren did so for the purpose of bringing peace and happiness. Therefore, by analyzing the development of *kaji kito* within Nichiren Buddhism, it seems that Nichiren's followers and the Nichiren Shu priests have altered the methods of *kaji kito* for the primary purpose of emphasizing Nichiren's hope for prosperity.

In further observing the objective of *kaji kito* practice from Nichiren's time, we see that the majority of people had desires relating to having good health and fixing illnesses. Nichiren tried to perform *kaji kito* for all of these individuals, yet in the process, he also had to confirm that the individual was a devout follower of the *Lotus Sutra* and only performed *kaji kito* services for those that professed their faith to it. Often times, he would say that his *kaji kito* would not be effective towards those that did not profess their faith to the *Lotus Sutra*. As a result, we still see that Nichiren wanted to convert as many people as he could to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* suggesting that they would provide the peace and happiness that everyone desired. In attending to the desires that everyone had, Nichiren believed that he would in the process not only show the effectiveness and the validity in the *Lotus Sutra*, but also bring happiness to the people.

In essence, Nichiren's incorporation of *mikkyo* into his practice shows a major step towards his own major attempts at spreading the *Lotus Sutra*. When many hear or see the different ideas that Nichiren incorporated from other sutras and other schools of Buddhism, many are quick to suggest that Nichiren had no original ideas. Yet as we see, encompassing these

different ideas further shows how much Nichiren truly educated himself in order to find what teaching would best fit his objectives. Therefore, Nichiren probably understood that esoteric practices were necessary to bring the *Lotus Sutra* and religion as a whole, closer to the people in order to gain their acceptance of it. As suggested before, most of the individuals who studied Buddhism prior to Nichiren's time did so for primarily the purpose of education, with the exception of some, including women of the aristocratic class who saw specific texts of Buddhism as providing them the answer to their existence and giving them a sense of worth within the society. Nichiren's emphasis on the *odaimoku* was one way that he tried to provide a means for the common people to develop and create their own spiritual faith. Nichiren used *kaji kito* in that same respect, trying to show people the importance of having faith.

Because Nichiren had such a strong relationship to the spirits by always praying and having faith in their existence throughout his life, he believed that the spirits were in charge of bringing happiness as much as they were responsible for either bringing or causing problems or calamities in the world. However, this notion is not unique, provided that since the beginning of time, many traditions and cultures looked to a higher deity and believed that changes in the environment or nature were a sign from the higher deity. Therefore, it was only instinctual that people would believe in spirits.

Nichiren's disciples as well as all of the Nichiren Shu priests that have continued to uphold Nichiren's teachings throughout their life seem to have further developed this notion of using spirits to bring happiness. Although Nichiren himself elaborated on the notion of doing away with evil spirits, he also thought that this action would bring the "good" spirits back. The Nichiren priests that continue to propagate his teachings further elaborate on this by making both processes directly obvious, as in having a specific action as part of a prayer for removing evil

spirits and another for bringing the good spirits back. Most common examples of these include the initial use of only the *bokken* in *kaji kito* practice. Although the *juzu* could also provide the same objective of protecting oneself from evil spirits it also has the purpose of also bringing in the good spirits. Therefore, by combining both the *bokken* and the *juzu*, we directly see this relationship. Observing the relationship between the importance of Hariti and Mahakala can also lead to similar conclusions. Once again, it is unknown whether Nichiren really did worship Mahakala, however, his purpose behind worshipping Hariti involved several reasons. Yet it is interesting to note that Hariti, whose carvings initially had gentle features, now contain similar facial features as that of Acala, who scares away the evil spirits. Similarly, Mahakala whose initial carvings and paintings showed a deity having fearful features, now in Japan has a gentler face. Therefore, we see that Hariti maintains the position of scaring away the evil spirits, while Mahakala brings in happiness. By making the process of bringing in peace and prosperity more obvious to the followers of Nichiren Buddhism, the intention to bring happiness to the people has become more apparent.

However, not all changes in the history of the development of *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism have led up to the expectations of Nichiren. Examples include the incorporation of nonbelievers of the *Lotus Sutra* into the confines of *aragyo* practice and teaching them the long-kept hidden secrets of Nichiren Buddhist *kaji kito*. This is different in the case of the merging of the different denominations and methods of *kaji kito* practice within Nichiren Buddhism, which as suggested, has led to its development and the continued spread of *kaji kito*. On a similar note, using *kaji kito* on people that do not believe in the *Lotus Sutra* was something that Nichiren did not permit. However, this was also slightly changed because using *kaji kito* in this way increased

believers of the *Lotus Sutra* to some extent, so it is questionable whether it truly did not live up to Nichiren's expectations.

Throughout this process, many critics of *kaji kito* fail to recognize the physical and spiritual toll that *kaji kito* takes on the priests who use it as a method of helping individuals with their problems. Although the *bokken* is something that is used to transmit spiritual power to the person receiving the *kito*, there is reciprocity involved in the process meaning that with the transmission of "good" karma and spirits to the individual, the priest must accept the negative karma of the individual in return. As a result, when the priests train in *aragyō*, they are in essence trying to accumulate as many good benefits as possible through prayer and purification of their own spirit so that they would have enough benefits to transmit to as many people as he can. Although the intentions are slightly different, this could somewhat relate to Nichiren's notion that he himself wanted to take on the suffering of the people and instead provide them with happiness. This transmission of benefits between the *kaji kito* practitioner and the person receiving *kaji kito* remains a significant reason behind the importance of *kaji kito* practice.

When considering the future of *kaji kito* specifically in Nichiren Buddhism, many have differing opinions. The majority of the popularity of *kaji kito* practice depends upon how well the priests can satisfy the changing demands of the generation. For example, the reason behind why the majority of the *kaji kito* that Nichiren conducted was based on curing illnesses was because there were several epidemics during that time along with several natural disasters, which left more people inclined to desire for good health. While there are still many individuals who go to *kaji kito* practitioners in the hopes of curing their illnesses, many people also have desires that match the expectations of the modern world, which include doing well on an entrance exam to a prestigious university or getting the job offer that one desires. Although in essence, these wishes



are also for the purpose of gaining happiness, at the same time, the definition of happiness seems to also have changed with the process. Thus in the modern-day world, it seems as if it is not enough for people to be happy with just living a healthy life—people want more. This is not to say that this is a new idea that has recently just started, yet it seems as if these types of desires have increased with time.

With the changing generation, we also see that many people who enter *kaji kito* practice also have differing objectives. Some of these may include genuinely recognizing the importance that *kaji kito* practice has in Nichiren Shu Buddhism. Yet for others, it may also be a way for them to gain increased awareness of the seriousness of prayer and the benefits that it can provide for many. As a result, the majority of the *aragyō* practitioners that I spoke to have suggested that upon entering *aragyō* they realize their inexperience in helping the believers of the *Lotus Sutra* attain their happiness. Thus, there is something to be gained from the severities of *aragyō* that individuals who do not undergo the practice will never know. Not all individuals will have the mental capability to undergo the practice a total of five times. It is important to note that like in many situations it is wrong to believe that the more number of times you enter *aragyō*, the easier the practice gets—the level of physical and mental austerities remain the same. Provided the uniqueness of Japanese Buddhism that the son of a priest often times is expected to take over the temple, many wonder whether these sons who eventually become priests have the same intentions when entering *aragyō* practice. Although it is hard to address this issue without interviewing many more priests, it is true that there are still many who enter *aragyō* for the true purpose, which is to learn how to use prayer to help believers of the *Lotus Sutra*.

From a western perspective, many question why even though Nichiren himself suggested that women could attain Enlightenment, women are not allowed to under *aragyō* practice.

Further analysis is needed to completely answer this question, yet what remains clear is that nuns within the Nichiren Shu sect are still able to use prayer in order to help the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra*. This is primarily because Nichiren himself provided the *odaimoku* that anyone could chant as a form of *kaji kito*. However, if this is the case, then why do some priests still enter *aragyō*? This is probably because many of the hidden secrets of *kaji kito* practice and methods of effective prayer were verbally transmitted and at the same time, the austerity provides the priests a way to seclude themselves from the outside world and to focus on prayer to purify their own spirit and prepare to help others through *kaji kito*. To go through such physical ordeals in order to attain such “power” and to use prayer to the extreme is something that not only further supports Nichiren’s own emphasis on prayer, but also the need for many more individuals to realize the importance of prayer in religion as a whole. This statement is not meant to suggest that all priests should enter *aragyō* or undergo ascetic practice, however, just that this emphasis on prayer in general may play a significant role for the future of Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

The fact that many do not know about *kaji kito* in Nichiren Buddhism further shows us that not many understand its prevalence within the history and development of Nichiren Shu Buddhism. For this, one needs to reevaluate the true meaning of prayer and the reasons behind its significance. The hope is that *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism will remain an important component within the tradition, one that encourages bringing happiness to people and to the world through prayer.

APPENDIX



**Figure 1.** Copies of the paintings of Rangaraja (*Japanese. Aizen*) (top) and Acala (*Japanese. Fudo-Myoo*) (bottom), the two Kings of Knowledge drawn by Nichiren in 1254. This picture was taken from Nichiren's *Fudo Myoo Aizen Kankenki* from the *Showa Teihon Ibun*.



**Figure 2.** Picture of Nichiren's Mandala at the Kuonji Temple at Mount. Minobu. The picture was taken at the museum at the temple during my trip to Japan.



Figure 3. Picture of *senkyo* (left), *bokken* (middle), and *juzu* used for *kaji kito* (right).



Figure 4. Picture of different types of *bokken* used throughout the history of the *kaji kito* in Nichiren Shu Buddhism. The *bokken* on the very right is thought to be the oldest, while the *bokken* on the left is thought to look the most similar to the *bokken* used today. These objects can be found at the museum at the Kuonji Temple in Mount. Minobu. This picture was taken during my trip to Japan.





**Figure 5.** The pictures of priests lined up doing *kuji* using both the *bokken* and *juzu*. My father is the second individual from the left.



**Figure 6.** The priests are lined up moments before entering the *zuimon* to start their *aragyo* training. This picture along with Figures 7 and 8 are pictures from the times when my own father entered *aragyo* practice.



**Figure 7.** The priests lining up moments after leaving the *zuimon* after completing their 100-day practice. My father is the first *gyoso* shown from the right.





**Figure 8.** The picture of priests lined up after completing their *aragyō* training. The two flags shown read “*kansui byakujiku bonkotsu masani karenantosu*” (right) and “*rizanjige shotai onozukara shozu*” (left) and encompass the essence of the *aragyō* training.



**Figure 9.** A sculpture of Hariti (*Japanese. Kishimojin*) from the Kamakura period at the Onjoji Temple in the Shiga Prefecture. She is holding a pomegranate in the right hand and Priyankara with her left. The photo is courtesy of *The Hidden Buddha of Japan* (2002), Corona Books.



**Figure 10.** A modern-day sculpture of the “demon-faced” Hariti. The photo is courtesy of a Japanese store selling sculptures and necessary objects for Buddhist altars ([www.butsudanya.co.jp](http://www.butsudanya.co.jp)).



**Figure 11.** A painting of Mahakala (*Japanese. Daikokuten*) from Tibet (15<sup>th</sup> Century). This is suggested to be one of the earlier known paintings of Mahakala. The picture of this painting is courtesy of the Himalayan Art Resources website.



**Figure 12.** A modern-day carving of the smiling Mahakala. The photo is courtesy of a Japanese store selling sculptures and necessary objects for Buddhist altars ([www.butsudanya.co.jp](http://www.butsudanya.co.jp)).

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